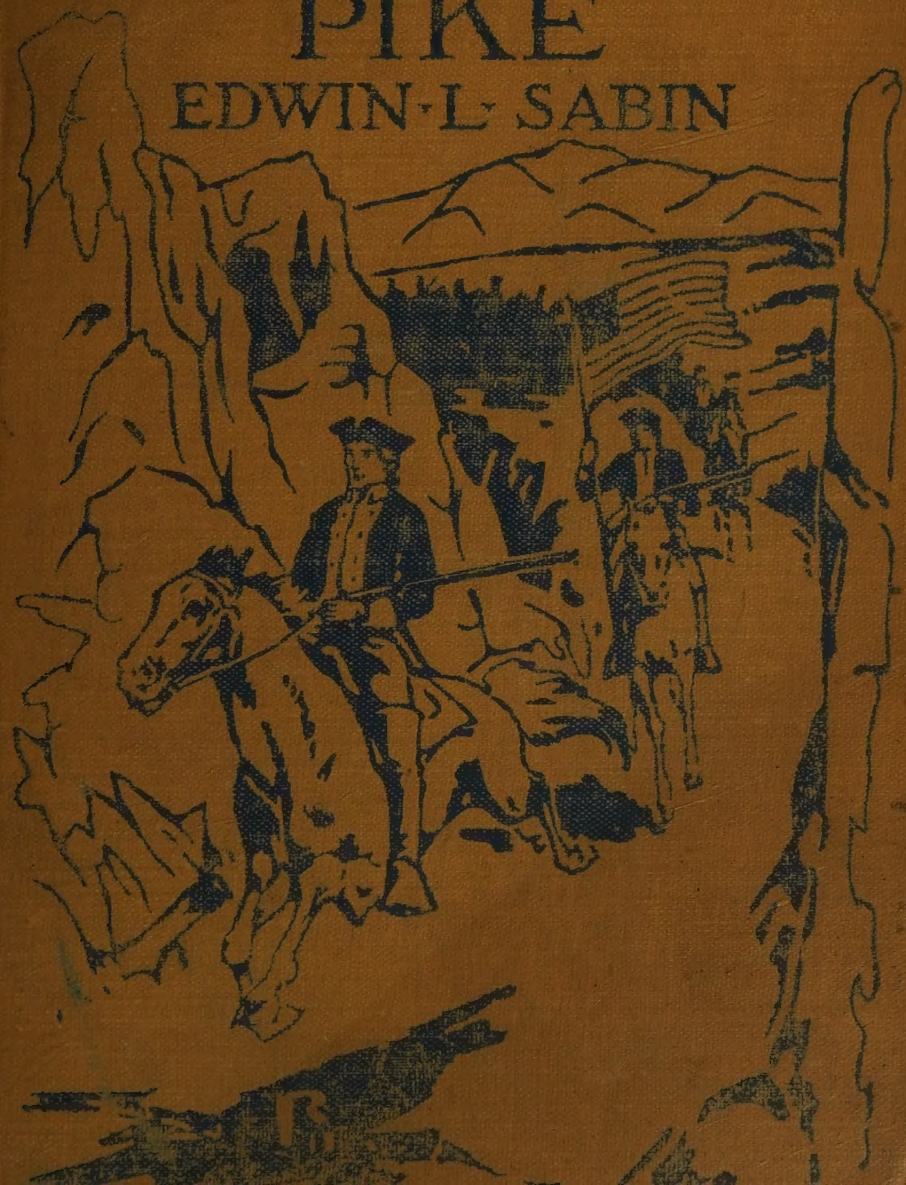
LOST WITH LIEUTENANT PIKE

EDWIN L. SABIN



LOST WITH LIEUTENANT PIKE

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"IT'S THE WRONG PEAK, MEN—YES, THE WRONG PEAK"

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LOST WITH LIEUTENANT PIKE

HOW FROM THE PAWNEE VILLAGE THE BOY NAMED SCAR HEAD MARCHED WITH THE YOUNG AMERICAN CHIEF CLEAR INTO THE SNOWY MOUNTAINS; HOW IN THE DEAD OF WINTER THEY SEARCHED FOR THE LOST RIVER AND THOUGHT THAT THEY HAD FOUND IT; AND HOW THE SPANISH SOLDIERY CAME UPON THEM AND TOOK THEM DOWN TO SANTA FÉ OF NEW MEXICO, WHERE ANOTHER SURPRISE AWAITED THEM

BY

EDWIN L. SABIN

AUTHOR OF "GENERAL CROOK AND THE FIGHTING APACHES,"
"OPENING THE WEST WITH LEWIS AND CLARK,"
"BUFFALO BILL AND THE OVERLAND TRAIL," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
CHARLES H. STEPHENS
PORTRAIT AND A MAP

PHILADELPHIA & LONDON
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TO THOSE

COUNTLESS OTHER AMERICANS

WHO IN 1917 AND 1918 BRAVELY FOLLOWED, LIKE YOUNG LIEUTENANT PIKE, THE TRAIL OF HONOR, FLAG AND DUTY

I. Always preserve your honor free from blemish.
II. Be ready at all times to die for your country.

General Pike's rules for his little son.

FOREWORD

THIS story takes the adventure trail of that young soldier-explorer Zebulon Montgomery Pike, who was lost in the mountains of southern Colorado one hundred years ago. Another story in the Trail Blazers Series has told of Captains Lewis and Clark, who explored the northwestern part of the new Louisiana Territory. They, also, were young. Captain Lewis had just turned thirty. But Lieutenant and Captain Zebulon Pike was younger yet. He was only twenty-seven when, while Lewis and Clark were still out, he was sent to lead a handful of men into the unknown Southwest.

The vast Province of Louisiana, bought by the United States from France three years before, for $15,000,000, was thought by the United States to extend, in the north, from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains; in the south it tapered off to the Gulf of Mexico at New Orleans.

The southwestern boundary was uncertain. The United States claimed clear to the lower Rio Grande River, across Texas; Spain, which had owned Louisiana Territory before the United States bought it from France, claimed north even to the Missouri

River. Some said that the Arkansas River of southern Colorado should be the boundary, there; some said the Red River, further south—which was confused with the Canadian River. And when Lieutenant Pike was started out, the United States soldiers and the Spanish soldiers of Mexico faced each other across the Sabine River of the western border of Louisiana State.

So the trail of young Pike and his handful of men pointed into a debated land. If the Indians did not get them, the Spanish might. He had been instructed not to offend the Spanish, and to keep away from their settlements of New Mexico; but he was resolved to stand his ground when he deemed that he was in the right, and to defend the Flag. The Spanish had sent six hundred soldiers, with over two thousand horses and mules, to look for him. He would certainly have fought them all, with his twenty men, had they tried to stop him anywhere outside of New Mexico.

No braver soldiers ever marched than Lieutenant Pike and his little platoon. They lost their way; they struggled with cold below zero and snow to their waists, in the bleak high mountains. They had left home with only summer clothing; they were ragged and lean, and their feet froze until the bones came out. They went days at a time without food.

And they were utterly lost, in a winter country; alone, one thousand miles from home.

But only once did a single man complain aloud. Their wonderful leader sternly silenced him, by reminding him that they all were sharing and suffering alike.

When their lieutenant had been gone from them two days, seeking meat to relieve a famine, at his return he writes in his journal: "On the countenances of the men was not a frown, nor was there a desponding eye; all seemed happy to hail their officer and companions; yet not a mouthful had they eaten for four days." Indeed, they were planning to send out and rescue *him.*

It was this same spirit which made the American soldiers in France press forward, ever forward, and yield not an inch of ground.

Lieutenant Pike was an officer to love as well as to respect. He asked no favors; only obedience, and willingness to endure what he had to endure. He never spared himself. While others might stay in camp, he it was that went out into the cold and snow, hunting for meat. He made it plain that his honor, his country and his duty were more to him than his life. These were the three ideals that inspired him to go on when he might have been excused

for camping in safety and giving up his search for the Red River.

The name of Pike lives in history. We have a famous mountain named for him, and we know that he died—" killed in action "—as a brigadier-general, aged thirty-four. The names of his brave men have vanished. What became of John Sparks, Pat Smith, Jacob Carter, and the rest, we do not know. We do not know that the Government even rescued from the Spaniards those whom their lieutenant had been obliged to leave. We do not know that any of them received gifts of land and extra pay, such as the Lewis and Clark men received. But heroes they were, every one, who did not fail their leader nor their flag.

So their company roll is printed in this book, that they also may live again.

THE AUTHOR

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LIEUTENANT ZEBULON MONTGOMERY PIKE
From the First Edition of His "Expeditions"
Philadelphia, 1810

BRIGADIER-GENERAL ZEBULON MONTGOMERY PIKE

A noble young American soldier and explorer, whose guiding purpose was: Honor, Country, Duty.

Born January 5, 1779, at Lamberton, near Trenton, New Jersey.

His father was Captain Zebulon Pike, of the Fourth Continental Dragoons, in the War of the Revolution; later major in the Third and the First Regiments of Infantry, U. S. A., and brevet lieutenant-colonel.

The boy Zebulon was brought up as a soldier.

At fifteen he was a cadet in his father's infantry regiment of the United States Third Sub-Legion.

At twenty, or in March, 1799, he was commissioned second lieutenant in the Second Regiment of Infantry, U. S. A.

Commissioned first lieutenant, November, the same year.

Transferred to the First Infantry, of which his father was major, in April, 1802. In this regiment Meriwether Lewis, of the famous Lewis and Clark expedition to the mouth of the Columbia River, was then a captain.

At the age of twenty-six, while Captains Lewis and Clark are exploring through the far northwest of the new Louisiana Territory purchase, he receives orders, July 30, 1805, from General James Wilkinson, Chief of the Army, to ascend the Mississippi River from St. Louis to its source. He is to report upon the country, the Indians and the fur trade of this, the eastern border of Upper Louisiana.

Starts from St. Louis, August 9, 1805, with twenty enlisted men of the regular army, in a keel-boat seventy feet long, provisioned for four months. Suffers many hardships by

storm, cold and hunger, but returns successful on the last day of April, 1806, after an absence of almost nine months.

In less than two months, or on June 24, 1806, he is directed to ascend the Missouri and Osage Rivers, and restore forty-six Osage Indians, rescued by the Government from the Potawatomi Indians, to their people of the Osage towns in western Missouri. He is to make peace, by order of their American father, between the Osage and the Kansas nations. He is then to continue to the Pawnees of present northern Kansas, and ask them to help him on to make peace with the Comanches in the southwest on the borders of New Mexico. While with the Comanches he is to explore the head-waters of the Arkansas and Red (Canadian) Rivers, but he must avoid trespassing upon the Spanish territory of New Mexico. Spanish territory is supposed to extend south from the Red River, although the Spanish claim that it extends much farther north, even through Kansas.

Again he leaves his family, and embarks, July 15, 1806, with First Lieutenant James B. Wilkinson, First Infantry, the son of General Wilkinson; Civilian Surgeon John H. Robinson, an interpreter, and eighteen enlisted men, in two boats. The majority of the enlisted men had been with him up the Mississippi.

He visits the Osages, who welcome the return of their relatives, and agree to peace with the Kansas. The Pawnees try to stop him, by order of the Spanish, but he defies them. He fails to find the Comanches. His march by horse and foot takes him along the Arkansas River clear to the Rocky Mountains, where he sights the great Pike's Peak (later named for him) of Colorado, and attempts to climb it. Searching for the head of the Red River, that he may follow down to the military posts of the United States frontier, he loses his way completely. In the bitter cold and deep snows of a terrible winter he crosses the front range of the Rockies, and builds a stockade upon a stream of the Upper Rio Grande River in the lower end of the San Luis Valley, southern Colorado.

Here in mid-winter Spanish soldiers from Santa Fé come upon him and inform him that he is in Spanish territory. They

take him down to Santa Fé, the capital of the Province of New Mexico. He is sent on down to the military headquarters at Chihuahua, Mexico. From there he is sent to the United States, and arrives at the American post of Natchitoches, western Louisiana, on July 1, 1807, after travels of a year.

As the first Government explorer through far southwestern Louisiana Territory he brings back much valuable information upon the country and Indians, and upon the people, military forces and customs of Mexico. Captains Lewis and Clark have brought back also their information upon the far Northwest.

Meanwhile, as a reward for his services, he had been promoted to captain, August 12, 1806.

Commissioned major, in the Sixth U. S. Infantry, May, 1808.

Commissioned lieutenant-colonel, Fourth U. S. Infantry, December, 1809.

Commissioned colonel, Fifteenth U. S. Infantry, July, 1812.

Appointed brigadier-general, adjutant-general and inspector-general, U. S. A., March, 1813.

Killed in action, April 27, 1813, while commanding the assault by the American troops upon York, at Toronto, Canada. The retreating British garrison blew up a powder magazine, and a fragment of rock crushed his back. He died wrapped in the Flag, amidst victory, at the age of only thirty-four.

THE PIKE PARTIES

Up the Mississippi (1805–1806)

First Lieutenant Zebulon M. Pike, Commanding
Pierre Rousseau, Interpreter
Sergeant Henry Kennerman (reduced to the ranks)
Corporals { Samuel Bradley / William E. Meek

Privates

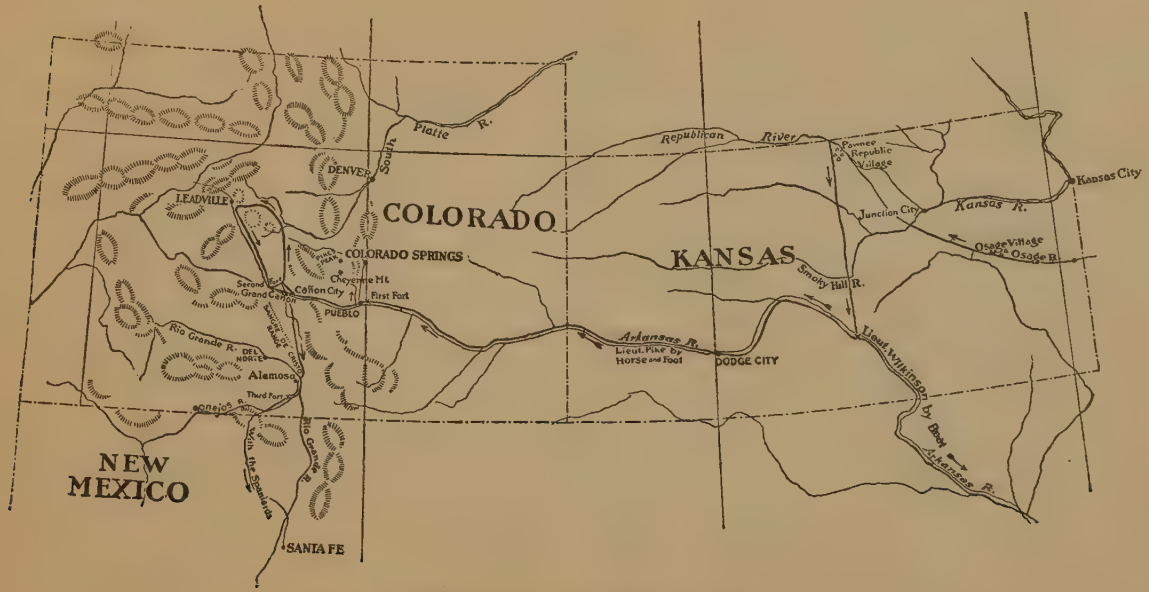
Jeremiah Jackson	Theodore Miller
John Boley	Alexander Roy
Thomas Dougherty	Patrick Smith
Solomon Huddleston	John Brown

THE PIKE PARTIES

Jacob Carter	John Sparks
David Whelply	Freegift Stout
William Gordon	David Owings
John Mountjoy	Peter Branden
Hugh Menaugh	

INTO THE SOUTHWEST (1806–1807)

First Lieutenant (and Captain) Zebulon M. Pike, Commanding
First Lieutenant James B. Wilkinson (descended the Arkansas River)
Civilian Volunteer, Doctor John H. Robinson (went through)
Baroney Vasquez, Interpreter (went through)
Sergeants { Joseph Ballenger (accompanied Lieutenant Wilkinson)
Sergeants { William E. Meek (went through)
Corporal Jeremiah Jackson (went through)
Private John Brown (went through)
Private Jacob Carter (went through)
Private Thomas Dougherty (went through)
Private William Gordon (went through)
Private Theodore Miller (went through)
Private Hugh Menaugh (went through)
Private John Mountjoy (went through)
Private Alexander Roy (went through)
Private John Sparks (went through)
Private Patrick Smith (went through)
Private Freegift Stout (went through)
Private John Boley (accompanied Lieutenant Wilkinson)
Private Samuel Bradley (accompanied Lieutenant Wilkinson)
Private Solomon Huddleston (accompanied Lieutenant Wilkinson)
Private John Wilson (accompanied Lieutenant Wilkinson)
Private Henry Kennerman (deserted)



THE TRAIL OF LIEUTENANT PIKE

LOST WITH LIEUTENANT PIKE

I

THE COMING OF THE SPANIARDS

"Ai-ee! I see them!" panted Iskatappe, over his shoulder, and pointing to the west. "The Spanish!"

"It may be running buffalo, or a big wind," answered Skidi.

"Shall we halt and wait?" proposed Letalesha.

"No. It is they. It does not move fast enough for buffalo or wind. It is on this side of the river. We will cross the river and hide on the other side. Then we will be safe," ordered Iskatappe.

Boy Scar Head, at the rear, peered hard and he, too, sighted a dust cloud far westward, tinging the horizon above the rolling, sandy landscape.

This was the Corn month, July, 1806. The four were travelling in single file at fast dog-trot down through the northern end of Texas where the Canadian River crosses. Iskatappe, or Rich Man, led. He was second chief of the nation. Skidi, or Wolf, came next. He was a warrior. Letalesha, or

Old Knife, trotted third. He was a sub-chief. And at the rear there trotted Scar Head, who was not yet even a warrior, because he was just a boy; but some day he should be a warrior, and a chief, if he proved brave and smart.

They were odd-looking Indians, clad in only moccasins and buffalo-robes. The three men had their heads closely shaven except for a short pompadour ridge like a rooster comb, ending in the scalp-lock. With a paste of buffalo tallow and red clay this scalp-lock was made to stand up stiff and curved forward in shape of a horn. By that sign, and by the sign of their travelling afoot, and by their tall stature and high cheek-bones, friends and enemies would have known them at once as Pawnees from a nation of fierce fighters.

However, nobody would have taken Scar Head for a Pawnee. He did not wear the horn—he was not yet a warrior. He wore a red cloth band around his head, to keep his long brown hair out of his eyes. He was short and stocky, with a pug nose and with freckles showing through his darkly tanned skin. No, he did not appear to be a Pawnee, nor an Indian at all.

Still, he ranked as a son of Charakterik, head chief of the Pawnee Republic nation. Chief Charakterik had sent him out on the warrior trail to get

experience. He was called Scar Head by reason of the patch of white hair that grew over a queer, hot spot on his head. He felt like an Indian and acted like an Indian; but all he knew was that he had been traded by the mountain Utahs to the plains Pawnees, several years ago, and that Chief Charakterik had adopted him.

The four had set out from the main Pawnee Republic village of round mud huts on the Republican River in present northern Kansas two weeks back. The Pawnees always started from home on foot, except when hunting game. They thought that they could take care of themselves better that way. A man on foot could hide in country where a man on horse might be seen. But they were expected to return on horseback, with other horses stolen or captured, for to win horses was the test of a Pawnee brave.

Scar Head hoped to learn a great deal about horse-stealing, although this was not really a horse-stealing scout. Nevertheless——

"If we are not given horses by the Spaniards, we will get them elsewhere," had said Rich Man.

"Yes; we will get them from the Spaniards, anyway," had replied Skidi. "They will have many horses, easy to steal. But in order to keep friendly

with us, they will surely give us some, when they see we are poor and afoot."

The dust cloud was welcome. It was time that the Spaniards should be sighted—those Spanish soldiers who, according to the report received by Chief Charakterik, were marching from New Mexico into the Indian country, no one knew why. To find out was the business of the Iskatappe squad.

The dust cloud hung in the air, moving slowly with the distant breeze. When finally the four reached the bank of the river, the cloud was much nearer.

"We will cross, and watch them; and to-night we will go into their camp," said Iskatappe.

So they swam and waded the shallow river, and crawled out into a clump of willows, to wait until the strangers should pass.

Soon, to the west they might see a column of mounted figures coming on, following the course of the river but staying back from it on account of the deep washes, or maybe from fear that their thirsty horses might bolt into quicksands.

"They are many times ten," murmured Skidi, counting by the fingers on his hands.

"It is only an advance guard," Letalesha said. "A bigger dust cloud is behind them."

And that was so. The advance guard of horse-

men seemed to be scouting along the river, as if seeking a good trail to water for the others. Boy Scar Head strained his eyes to see as much as the warriors saw. Over the yellow desert shimmering with the hot air the riders steadily cantered, under several fluttering pennons borne on lances; and anybody might tell by the way they rode that they were warriors themselves.

They were going to strike the river only a short distance below. Suddenly Skidi drew quick breath.

"Apaches! Look! It will be a fight."

"Hi!" Iskatappe uttered. "Let nobody move. We are safe here, if we don't move."

The scene had changed in a twinkling. A perfect swarm of Indians had burst from the very ground out there, and with shrill yells were racing to hem the Spanish between them and the river. How they had hidden themselves so well was remarkable, but it was an Indian trick and these were Apaches, who knew how to hide in the sand itself.

They outnumbered the Spanish three to one. The Spanish leader rapidly formed his column—he rode a white horse, the horses of his men were dark. On charged the Apaches, whooping and brandishing their bows and lances, as if they did not intend to stop until they had ridden right over the enemy; when on a sudden the guns of the Spanish puffed

white smoke. Instantly every Apache fell to hang on the side of his horse; and back and forth they all scurried, shooting with their bows. The arrow stems glinted in the sun like streaks of hail.

"That is a good chief," Iskatappe praised. "He knows how to fight."

For the Apache chief had ordered half his men to dismount, and turn their horses loose. The other half stayed in the saddle. They charged, with the footmen running behind; the Spanish horsemen charged to meet them; then the Apache horsemen separated to right and left and the footmen volleyed with arrows.

This made the Spanish halt, to answer with guns. The Apache footmen darted back, behind their horsemen, and these charged again, to lure the Spanish on into bow-shot.

Boy Scar Head quivered with excitement. It was the first real battle that he remembered to have seen. The others were tense, too, and staring eagerly.

"With half that number of Pawnees I would eat those Spanish up," Skidi boasted. "We all would take scalps and horses and be rich."

"Those Spanish have guns and much powder and lead," replied Old Knife. "It is hard to fight

guns with bows. But one big charge, and all would be over."

The battle slowly traveled. It was getting directly opposite, as the Apaches gradually gave ground and the Spanish took ground. Scarcely anybody appeared to have been hurt yet; there were no dead on the sand and all the wounded stayed in their saddles. The column in the distance was making a larger dust, as if hastening to the rescue.

The Apaches no doubt knew this. Now on a sudden the noise quieted. The Apache chief had cantered forward from among his men, shaking his lance. He was a very heavy man, with a very long lance; upon his arm was a red shield. He rode a fine spotted horse.

"The chiefs will fight, maybe," quoth Letalesha. "That is the way to settle it."

The Apache chief spoke in a loud voice, holding his lance high; but the Spanish chief on the white horse waved him back and evidently said no.

"The Spanish chief is a coward," Skidi asserted. "He has a small heart."

"Why should he risk losing his scalp, when he is winning and he has enough men coming to burn the Apaches like dry grass?" argued the wise Old Knife.

The Apache chief sat a moment, waiting; then

he turned back for his own party. From the Spanish a great shout arose, that made him again turn, quickly.

"Ai-ee! It will be a fight, man to man, after all!" Iskatappe exclaimed.

A Spanish soldier had dashed past his chief, and was galloping into the clear, flourishing his sword. It was a challenge. The chief sped to meet him. They both crouched behind their round shields. A moment—and they came together. The Spanish horseman thrust his shield forward, to throw aside the chief's lance point. But he did not catch it full. He only threw it higher, so that it glanced on and struck him in the throat—went straight through. He fell off, backward. Jerking the lance out, the Apache chief scoured by, in a half circle, with a whoop of victory.

"Hi, yi!" Old Knife grunted. "There is blood and a scalp."

What a yell broke from the Apaches and the Spaniards both—a yell of triumph from the one, a yell of vengeance from the others! The Spanish charged, firing their guns, to save the scalp, and to kill. The Apaches scattered; their chief galloped hither-thither, urging them to stand, but they had no stomachs for more fighting at close quarters and the rest of the Spanish were spurring in.

Presently all the Apaches, the footmen on horse again, tore away, making down the river. Without trying to pursue them the whole Spanish army gathered on the battlefield. They were too heavily clothed to overtake Indians.

"They are as many as a herd of buffalo," said Letalesha. "They are a large war party. Where are they going and what do they want?"

"We shall find out from them at sundown," Rich Man answered. "We will let them camp, first. They are blood hungry now, and very mad."

"It will be no trouble for us to get horses," laughed Wolf. "Even a boy like Scar Head could steal some."

"Will you let me try?" Scar Head asked, hopefully.

"You shall be a warrior and get horses," Iskatappe promised, "unless they make us presents of them."

"The Apache chief was Big Thunder," Old Knife declared. "I know him. Red is his medicine, and as long as he carries that red shield nothing can kill him."

"Perhaps the Spanish chief knew, too," Wolf proposed. "Of course, nobody wishes to fight against medicine."

"The Spanish soldier's medicine was very weak," remarked Iskatappe.

Thus they chatted, waiting and watching. Pretty soon the Spanish, also, moved on, down river. There were at least six hundred of them, all mounted, and twice that number of unsaddled horses and mules, some packed with supplies. To jingle of trappings and murmur of voices they proceeded, in a long column. Rich Man, Old Knife, Wolf and Boy Scar Head followed, by the other river bank, keeping out of sight in the brush and hollows.

At sunset the Spanish halted to form camp, beside the river.

"We had better go in before dark," Rich Man directed. "Or they might shoot at us. We had better go in while their pots are full, for my belly is empty."

So they rose boldly from their covert under the bank of the river, and crossed for the Spanish camp, their buffalo-robes tightly about them.

The camp was spread out in a circle over a wide area. Several chiefs' lodges had been set up, countless fires were smoking, horses whinnied, mules brayed, medicine pipes (horns) tooted, and a myriad of figures moved busily, getting water, going on herd, arranging the packs, marching to and fro as if in a dance, or clustering around the fires.

These were the Spanish, were they, from the south? Scar Head had not supposed that so many could come so far, all together. The nation of the Spanish must be a great and powerful nation.

A guard saw the Iskatappe file approaching. He shouted warning of them, and leveled his gun.

Iskatappe lifted his hand in the peace sign.

"Amigos—friends," he called. He knew a little Spanish. So did most of the Pawnees—a little Spanish picked up from the Comanches and southern Utahs, and a little French picked up from the St. Louis traders who visited the Pawnee country.

"Qué tiene—what do you want?" the guard demanded, stopping them with his gun. He was dressed in a blue cloth hunting-shirt with red trimmings, and leather wrappings upon his legs, and huge loose-topped leather moccasins reaching to his knees, and a broad-brimmed high-crowned hat with ribbons on it; and all his face was covered with bushy black hair. He was armed with a short-barreled gun, and a long knife in a scabbard. He certainly looked like a stout warrior.

"El capitan," Iskatappe replied, meaning that he wished to see the chief.

Other Spanish soldiers came running. Their head warrior said: "Come," and with the Iskatappe

file stalking proudly after he led the way through the staring camp to the lodge of the chief.

He was a black-eyed, dark-skinned, slim young war chief, splendidly clad in those same high, loose-topped shiny leather moccasins, and a bright red cloak flowing to his knees, and a hat turned up at one side and sparkling with gilt.

Of course the first thing to do was to eat. Therefore, after shaking hands with the Spanish war chief, Rich Man, Old Knife and Wolf sat down; boy Scar Head sat down likewise. They were served with plenty of meat, from a pot.

Gazing curiously about, Scar Head might see indeed that these Spanish were rich and powerful. Such quantities of horses and mules, of saddles, arms, supplies, and soldiers warmly dressed, and fiercely whiskered not only with hair on cheeks and chin, but sticking out like horns on either side of the nose! What did the Spanish wish?

Having eaten, Iskatappe began to find out. The Spanish chief filled a pipe and passed it out; Rich Man, Old Knife and Wolf smoked each a few puffs, the Spanish chief smoked a few puffs, and Iskatappe spoke.

"The Pawnee wish to know why their Spanish father is sending so many of his soldiers into the buffalo country."

"The great king who owns all this country is anxious to be friendly with his children," responded the young war chief. "So he has sent me, his lieutenant, Don Facundo Melgares, with a guard, to march through, take his red children by the hand, give them presents, and make the chain of friendship stronger."

"That is good," said Iskatappe. "The Pawnee Republic is very poor. But if my father is sending presents to the Pawnee, why are his men marching east instead of north? And why does he send so many soldiers with guns?"

"We follow a long trail," explained the war chief. "There are Indians of bad hearts toward everybody, like the Apaches; and the Apaches we will punish. The great king knows how to punish his enemies, as well as how to reward his friends. We are marching east because we go first to visit the Comanches. We bear gifts and friendship to the Comanches, to the Pawnees, and to the Kansas. And we march east to clean the country from the Americans who are stealing in. The great king will look after his own children. He wishes no foreigners to view the land. He will not permit the American traders to cheat the Indians. The American king pretends to have bought part of the coun-

try, but he has no rights here in the south, and the great king of Spain still owns all the lands beyond the Pawnees and the Kansas. Now word has come to the Spanish governor that the Americans are sending soldiers westward through Spanish country, to spy out the land. They are led by a chief named Pike. So we march ready for battle, to meet these Americans and either turn them back or take them prisoner."

"The Americans of Chief Pike will fight?" asked Iskatappe.

The young war chief laughed, showing white teeth.

"They cannot fight the soldiers of the great king. We are many and brave; the Americans are small. We can punish or reward. The Americans are weak and poor. Should there be war, we will eat them up. If they do not keep out of the country, there will be war. We shall warn them. The Indians would do very foolishly to help the Americans who have nothing, and are only greedy, seeking to steal the Indians' hunting grounds. First a few will come, as spies; then more will come by the same trail, and with their guns kill all the buffalo."

"We know little about the Americans, but we see that the Spanish are many and strong," Iska-

tappe replied. "I will take word back to the Pawnee, about this Pike."

"Who is your head chief?"

"He is Charakterik—White Wolf."

"Where does he live?"

"In his town of the Pawnee nation on the river of the Pawnee Republic."

"Tell him that after we have marched east and talked with the Comanches and cleaned the foreign traders from the country, we will march north and visit him at his town on the River Republican. If the American chief Mungo-Meri Pike comes there, the Pawnees must stop him; for the great king will be angry if the Americans are allowed to pass through."

"I will tell him," Iskatappe promised. "It is best that we travel fast. We came down on foot, for we are very poor. If we have horses to ride back on, we shall travel faster."

"Bueno—good," answered the Spanish chief. "Your father the great king of us all is generous to his children. You shall have horses, so that you may carry the news quickly."

This night the Iskatappe squad slept in the Spanish camp, and ate frequently. Rich Man explained to Old Knife and Wolf what had been said to him

and not understood by them. Boy Scar Head listened. In the morning they were treated to a marching dance, in which the Spanish soldiers moved to the beat of drums. They were presented with a horse apiece; and after having shaken hands again they left, well satisfied.

Once away from the river they rode fast; for Skidi had stolen three mules during the night while the guard was sleepy instead of watchful, and hidden the animals in a convenient place. But the Spanish did not pursue.

"We will tell Charakterik that the Spanish are strong," said Iskatappe. "They fought the Apaches; they have plenty of guns and horses. They will eat the Americans of that Pike."

"I think, myself, that the Pawnee will grow fatter by helping the Spanish father than by helping the strange American father," declared Old Knife.

"We have gained four horses and three mules," Skidi chuckled. "All the whites are stupid. If the Americans come they will go back afoot; hey?

"What kind of men are the Americans?" Boy Scar Head ventured to ask, from the rear.

"We are talking," Letalesha rebuked. "When chiefs and warriors talk, boys keep silent."

So Scar Head got no information. All he

knew was, that the Americans were a white nation living in the far east, beyond St. Louis where the French traders lived. But three Pawnees had been taken by the great trader Pierre Chouteau, to visit the American father in Wash'ton. When they returned, the Pawnees would know more about the Americans. And of course that Chief Pike was likely to appear if the Spanish did not stop him.

II

THE COMING OF THE AMERICANS

THE Spanish came in about three weeks—three hundred of them, led by their young war chief whose name was Melgares. A brave sight they made as they rode with flags and drums and jingle of bridles and formed camp outside the Chief Charakterik town.

Lieutenant Melgares held a council with the Republican Pawnees and the Grand Pawnees from the north. The Pawnee Loups, or Wolf Pawnees, did not send any chiefs, because they were at war with the other Pawnees.

The Spanish chief said that he had met the Ietans or Comanches in the south and signed a treaty of peace with them. They had promised to help their Spanish father. But on the way north the Omahas had stolen many of his horses and mules, after another council; and by reason of these bad hearts he had come on with only a few of his men, in order to smooth the road between the great king and the great king's children.

He was too young to sit in grand council with

the head chiefs of the Pawnees. In the spring a higher chief than he would come, to build a town near the Pawnee town, and live with the red people and teach them how to get rich, if they were good. Meanwhile they must watch out that the Americans (who were poor but greedy) did not sneak in, and cheat them of their lands and drive off the game. The American chief, Mungo-Meri Pike, was on the way, although he had not been found. If he arrived, he must be turned back. These were the orders of the king of the Spanish nation, who ruled all this country.

Lieutenant Melgares gave Chief Charakterik and the head chief of the Grand Pawnees each a large, fine medal of silver to wear; and a paper signed by the governor of New Mexico, which made them head men under the king; and a Spanish flag, and four mules. He laid on the prairie other gifts, of crimson cloth and of tobacco and smaller medals; and again warning them that the great king would be very angry if the crafty Americans were permitted to pass, he rode away south, with all his men.

Chief Charakterik hung the gay Spanish flag of red and yellow in front of the council lodge, as a sign for everybody to see. It was plain to him also that the Spanish nation was a powerful nation, to send so many soldiers so far, looking for the Americans.

The Spanish soldiers had not been gone long when from the Osage towns in the southeast toward the Missouri River there ran the news that the Americans of Mungo-Meri Pike were coming indeed. They were bringing to the Osages almost fifty men and women whom the Potawotomis had captured last year, and who had been rescued by the American father. Two of the Pawnees who had been to Wash'ton visiting the American father were with them on the way home.

"We will let them come this far, so as to get our brothers back," said Chief Charakterik. "We will talk with them and see what kind of men they are, but they shall go no farther."

He sent Pawnee scouts down to the Osage towns, to watch the Americans.

Now August, the squash month, had passed, and September, the month when the buffalo fatten, had opened. The Americans were reported to be at the Osage villages, where a welcome had greeted the Osages returned from the Potawatomis, and a great council had been held with the Pike men.

They had traveled in boats up the Osage River from the Missouri, but were coming on across country to the Pawnees by horses.

Only one American appeared, first, riding in with a Pawnee-who-had-been-to-Wash'ton as his

guide. This Pawnee young man had gone to visit the American father many moons ago, and here he was again, safe and sound and wearing good clothes. That spoke well for the Americans.

He said that the other Pawnee-who-had-been-to-Wash'ton was coming with the rest of the Americans. They were bringing several Osages to smoke with the Pawnees. They had sent word for the Kansas to meet them and smoke peace. The Americans were a pleasant people; they numbered thousands. This American with him was a medicine-man who cured diseases. The American chief, Pike, had given the Osages all the rescued captives and had asked nothing except peace and a chance to buy horses; he had presents for the Pawnees, too, and was going to the Comanches. His men were few although well armed.

The next day, after having talked with the American medicine-man in the lodge, Chief Charakterik took sixty warriors and rode out to meet Chief Mungo-Meri Pike.

Charakterik was gone three days, and came in without having sighted the Americans. But a Pawnee hunter reported that the Americans were farther to the southward; so Chief Charakterik sent out Frank (which was the American name of the

Pawnee-who-been-to-Wash'ton) and three other warriors, to find them.

On the second morning two of the scouts galloped back into town.

"The Pike Americans are nearing. They will be here before noon."

"Tell them to wait until I shall meet them and smoke with them," Chief Charakterik ordered.

All the warriors were arrayed, dressed in their best robes and blankets, and painted with the Pawnee colors of white, yellow, blue and black. Chief Charakterik wore his large Spanish medal and finest white buffalo-robe. Second Chief Iskatappe wore a red coat given him by his Spanish father.

Three hundred warriors left the village, with the chiefs. Riding in their midst, as the son of a great chief Scar Head felt that the Pawnees need fear nobody.

The Americans had halted about three miles out, just at the other side of a ridge. The Osages were sitting in front of them. Chief Charakterik shouted and waved his hand—the Pawnee warriors divided right and left and swooped down at dead run, yelling and firing their guns. The Americans stood firm, not afraid, as if they knew that this was only play. They were few, as said; scarcely more than the fingers on two hands.

After the warriors had charged and had formed a circle, Chief Charakterik and Second Chief Iskatappe advanced on foot to shake hands with the American chief. This Mungo-Meri Pike was a young man, in a long hunting-shirt or coat of blue with brass buttons and high standing collar and lighter blue facings; on his head there was a three-cornered hat; a curved sword was at his side and leather moccasins reached to his knees. He was redder than the Spanish chief Melgares, and had no hair on his face.

His men were armed with guns that ended in sharp-pointed knives, but their clothing was thin and poor—nothing like the rich clothing of the Spanish soldiers. They had a flag of red and white stripes and a starry blue square in one corner, but they were small in number; and all in all they did not cut much of a figure when compared with the Spanish. Certainly they were either brave or foolish, thought Boy Scar Head as he roundly stared, to dare the Spanish and the Indians in such fashion.

The Osages knew how to act when in Pawnee country. Their chief stood up and offered Chief White Wolf a pipe. They smoked, as sign of peace. Then at a signal by White Wolf, he and Mungo-Meri Pike and the American second chief (also a young man) rode on for the village. An American

head warrior on a white horse rode just behind, carrying the American flag. The Osages and the other Americans followed, while the Pawnee warriors raced back and forth alongside, whooping and showing off. It was great fun.

When they all had crossed the ridge and were near the town, another halt was ordered, in order to smoke horses with the Osages. The four Osages sat down together; Chief Charakterik sat down in front of them, and lighted his pipe. Any Pawnee who wished to give horses to an Osage took the pipe and passed it to the Osage. Every time it was passed it meant a horse, until eight horses had been given. This was the Horse Smoke.

The American second chief marched the soldiers on, to make camp up-river from the town. Chief Mungo-Meri Pike and his medicine-man stayed for a talk with White Wolf in his lodge. They were feasted to stewed corn and squash.

The Osages also were feasted in the village. They had come on with the Americans to meet the Kansas at the Pawnee village and sit in peace council. Pretty Bird was their head chief.

Everybody was curious to learn from the Osages and from the two Pawnee-who-had-been-to-Wash'-ton what kind of people these Americans were.

"They live in a country wider than a week's

travel by horse," Frank asserted. "You are never out of sight of their lodges."

"Their women have red cheeks, and their men are in number of the buffalo," the other Pawnee asserted. "They have great guns that shoot a mile and speak twice."

"If they are so powerful and many, why do they send such a little company into this country, when the Spanish father sent half a thousand soldiers at once?" inquired Skidi. "These are spies."

"They brought us forty-six of our relatives, from the Potawatomi," said an Osage. "They asked for horses to go on with, but we sold them few. Now by orders of the great father at Wash'ton we are to make peace with the Kansas. The great father wishes his red children to fight no more."

"It is all because there is talk of war between the Spanish and the Americans," Frank wisely declared. "That we heard. The Americans wish to keep the Indians from the war trail, so that they can march in here and take the land."

"We do not want the Americans in here," spoke Skidi. "Our Spanish father warned us against them. They are poor and stingy or they would have sent a large company and an old chief to treat with us. They will get no help from the Pawnee, and they must go back."

The American chief and his medicine-man stayed a long time in the Charakterik lodge. After a while Scar Head's older brother came looking for him.

"White Wolf says that you are to go on with the two Americans up to their camp and take a pony load of corn."

"How soon?"

"Now. They are leaving. The pony is being packed."

So Scar Head hastened to the lodge. The two Americans were bidding Chief Charakterik goodby, and were about to mount their horses. The chief beckoned to Scar Head and pointed to the pony. Scar Head obediently scrambled atop the corn.

"Do I come back to-night?" he asked.

"You may stay till morning, and see what you can see. Do not talk; and be sure and bring back the pony."

This was quite an adventure—to ride to the American camp with the head chief and the medicine-man, and maybe spend the night there. Scar Head's heart beat rapidly, but he did not show that he was either frightened or delighted, for he was Indian, and son of White Wolf.

He guided his loaded pony in the rear of the two trotting horsemen. Outside the town Chief Mungo-

Meri Pike reined in and dropped back beside him, with a smile.

They eyed each other, although Scar Head did not smile. He was not ready to smile, and White Wolf had told him not to talk.

The American chief had a clear pink and brown skin and a bright blue eye, with rather large nose and mouth, and stubborn chin. His manner was quick and commanding; anybody might see that he was a chief.

"What is your name?" he asked, suddenly, in French.

"Scar Head," answered Scar Head, in Pawnee.

Evidently the American chief did not understand Pawnee, for he looked a little puzzled.

"Do you speak French?" he demanded.

"Yes, little," answered Scar Head.

"You are not an Indian?"

"Yes, Pawnee," grunted Scar Head.

"You don't look like a Pawnee."

"Pawnee," Scar Head insisted, as he had been ordered always to do, by Charakterik.

"Who is your father?"

"White Wolf."

"Who was your mother?"

"Don't know."

"Were you born here?"

"Don't know."

"Do you speak English?"

"No."

"How old are you?"

Scar Head held up the fingers of his two hands; that was as nearly as he could guess. It didn't matter, anyway.

The American chief hailed the medicine-man in the American language. Scar Head did not understand, but the words were: "Doctor, I don't believe this is an Indian boy at all."

Now the medicine-man (he was a young man, with brown hair on his face) reined back to ride upon Scar Head's other side. He spoke, in French.

"Are you an Indian?"

"Yes."

"What nation?"

"Pawnee."

"Where did the Pawnee get you?"

"From Utahs."

"Chief Charakterik is not your father, then?"

"Yes. My father."

"Your mother a Utah?"

"Don't know."

"How long has Charakterik been your father?" The medicine-man was smart.

"Two year."

"I see. The Utahs probably traded him to the Pawnees, doctor," spoke the chief Mungo-Meri Pike, across, in the language that Scar Head did not understand. "And Charakterik adopted him."

"The Utahs must have got him somewhere. He's no Indian," replied the medicine-man, in those strange words. "He's not Spanish, either." And he asked, in French, of Scar Head:

"You speak Spanish?"

"A little."

"You speak Utah?"

Scar Head nodded. He was growing tired of these questionings.

The medicine-man kept eyeing him.

"Where did you get this?" And he tapped his own head, in sign of the patch of white hair.

"My name," answered Scar Head.

"What made it?"

"Don't know."

"Did the Utahs capture you?"

"Don't know."

"Where were you before the Utahs had you?"

"Don't know."

"He may not be all Indian, but he's enough Indian so he won't tell what he doesn't want to tell," laughed the American chief, in the strange words.

The medicine-man shrugged his shoulders.

"I'd like to take him along with us and find out more about him. By the shape of his head he's white blood."

The three jogged on in silence. Scar Head wondered what they had said, with those words, but he was glad to be let alone. White Wolf had forbidden him to talk with strangers. Nevertheless he glanced now and then at the two Americans. He felt more friendly toward them. They seemed kind.

The American camp was not far. It had guards stationed, who saluted the American chief when he passed. At his lodge fire he halted; a head warrior took Scar Head's pony, with the corn; other warriors took the two horses, to lead them away. The American second chief was here. While he and Chief Mungo-Meri Pike talked, Scar Head sat by the fire and looked around, to see what was going on.

The camp had been placed upon a hill for protection. There were only four or five lodges, of canvas, besides the chief's lodge. The American flag was flying from a pole. This American camp appeared poor—nothing. The soldiers, fifteen, wore shabby uniforms of sky blue; their coats were short and tight, their leggins thin, and several were mending their moccasins of heavy leather. They had only fifteen extra horses, to carry their bag-

gage and the presents. There was a black dog. They talked and laughed much, as they busied themselves or waited around the two fires that they had built. The hair on their heads was of different colors—brown, and black, and red, and gray. So was the hair on their faces. They were quick, active warriors—good men, evidently. If the Pawnees fought them, it would be hot work before they all were wiped out.

Maybe, thought Scar Head, they depended upon the medicine of their "doctor," to help them.

Another man, who could talk sign language and a little Pawnee, came and sat down beside him. He was the interpreter for Chief Pike.

"You're no Indian; you're white," he accused, of Scar Head.

"Indian," said Scar Head.

"Where did you come from?"

"Utahs."

"Where did they get you?"

"Don't know."

"Did White Wolf buy you from the Utahs?"

"He is my father."

"You speak with crooked tongue," the interpreter accused. "You are white. You are American. Who was your father?"

"White Wolf is my father. I am Pawnee. I will talk no more," said Scar Head. "Let me alone."

After that nobody bothered him, although they all eyed him. Why did they tell him that he was white? Did he wish to be white? Why should he be white, or American, when the Pawnee were a great people who could fight even the Padoucah—the Comanches or Ietans as they were called. And if one were white instead of red, it would be better to be Spanish, for the Spanish were rich and powerful, and their king owned the country.

Yet—yet, Scar Head could not help but admit that these Americans bore themselves like warriors: this Pike must be a bold young chief, to come so far with so few men; and after all, perhaps the Americans might prove strong in medicine. The Osages and the two Pawnee-who-had-been-to-Wash'ton spoke well of the nation.

The medicine-man approached him and suddenly laid fingers upon his white patch, and pressed.

"Does that hurt?"

Scar Head tried not to wince, for hurt it did. He squirmed free.

"No."

The medicine-man might be putting an evil spell

III

THE PAWNEES ARE OF TWO MINDS

"THE Kansas are coming! They come in peace, but make ready for them."

These were the words of the heralds shouting through the great town of the Pawnee Republic. Scar Head heard. He had returned this morning from the American camp with the interpreter (whose name was Baroney), and felt rather important as the other boys curiously questioned him. To Chief White Wolf he had only good to report of the Americans. They had treated him well, aside from bothering him with talk about himself; but he had told them little. The fact was, he did not know much that he could tell!

Baroney had wished to trade for provisions and horses. Now it was afternoon, and new excitement arose. The Kansas were coming! A peace party of them had halted, out on the prairie, and had sent in one man to announce them. They had come by order of the American father, to smoke peace with the Osages.

The Osages and the Kansas had long been bitter

enemies; the Pawnees, too, had lost many scalps to the Kansas, although just at present there was no war between them.

So Chief Charakterik directed that the Kansas be well received and feasted. Baroney the American interpreter took word up to the Pike camp that the Kansas were waiting.

The two American chiefs exchanged visits with Chiefs White Wolf and Rich Man, and the Kansas chiefs. In a council held the next day the Kansas principal chief, Wah-on-son-gay, and his sub-chiefs, and the Osage principal chief, Shin-ga-wa-sa or Pretty Bird, and his sub-chiefs, agreed upon paper that the nations of the Kansas and the Osage should be friends, according to the wish of their American father.

Wolf, the Pawnee, laughed.

"It will last only until spring," he said. "Nobody can trust the Kansas; and as for those Osage, they are getting to be a nation of squaws. One-half their face is red, the other half is white. We Pawnee are all red. We are not afraid of the Kansas, and we shall not help the Americans. They are a small people of small hearts, as the Spanish chief said."

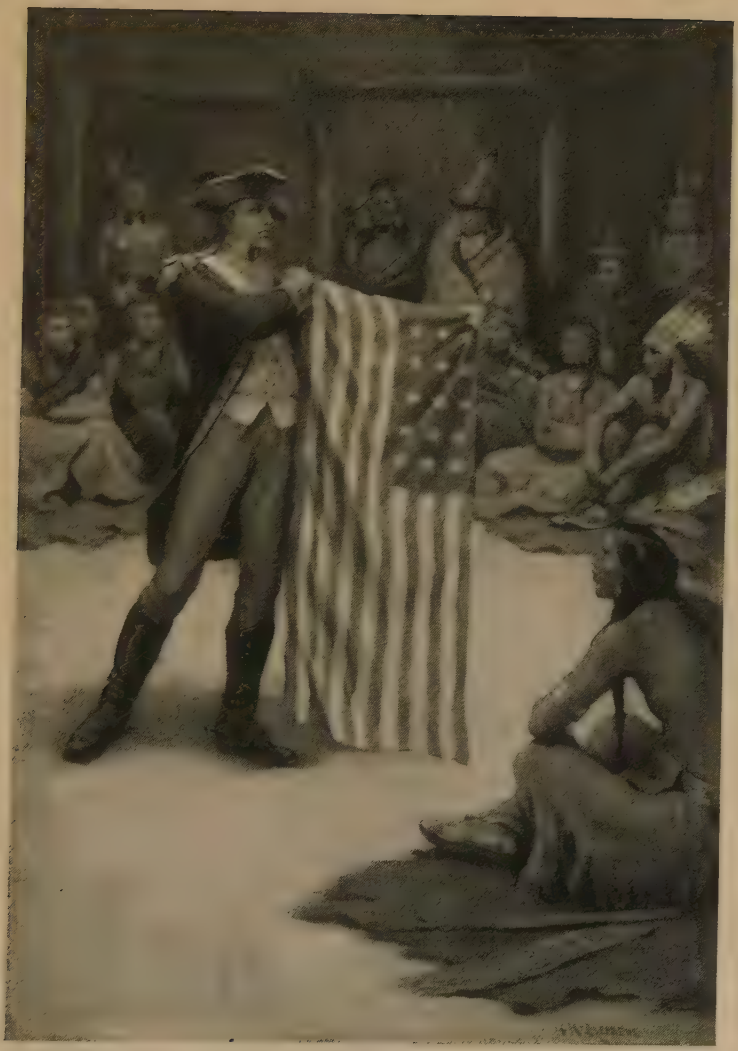
This might appear to be the truth. Chief Charakterik was of the same opinion. He and Second Chief Iskatappe and two sub-chiefs had been invited

to a feast by the American chiefs. When they returned they were scornful, although White Wolf had been given a gun with two barrels, an arm band, and other things, and the other chiefs also had been rewarded.

Scar Head heard Rich Man tell about it.

"Charakterik wore his large medal given him by the young Spanish chief. They did not ask him to take it off. They offered me a little American medal. 'What shall I do with that?' I asked. 'It is not a medal for a chief. Those two young warriors who have been to Wash'ton were given bigger medals than this. Let the American father send me a chief's medal, for I can get Spanish medals. I am not a boy.' Yes," continued Iskatappe, "the American nation must be very mean and stingy. They send a young man and a few soldiers, with little medals and a few poor presents, to talk with the great Pawnee nation. But the Spanish asked us to wait until next spring, when they will send us a principal chief and many more soldiers, to live near us and treat with us in honorable fashion."

The council with the Americans had been set for the next day. The two American chiefs, and Baroney the interpreter, and the "doctor," and a guard of soldiers, rode down. Chief Charakterik assembled four hundred warriors. The council lodge



"I BRING YOU THE AMERICAN FLAG"

was crowded, and a throng of women and boys and girls pressed around, outside, to peer and listen. Scar Head managed to squeeze inside, to a place where he might see and hear. The Osages and the Kansas were inside, too.

After the pipe had been passed around among the chiefs, Mungo-Meri Pike stood, to speak. He threw off his red-lined blue cloak, and stood slim and straight—a handsome young man.

Baroney translated for him, in Pawnee and sign language.

" The great American father of us all, at Wash'-ton, has sent me," he said. " He is now your father. You have no Spanish father. Not long ago the Spanish gave up all this country, from the big river to the mountains. The Americans have bought it. The Spanish have no rights here, any more. Now your American father has sent me to visit among his red children, to tell them that his heart is good toward them, and that he wishes peace. I am to take back word of them, and of the country, so that he may know. I am surprised to see that you are flying the Spanish flag at the lodge door. I bring you the American flag, to take its place. You cannot have two fathers and two flags. I have also brought you gifts. They are here. I ask you to accept them, as a small token from your American

father. I should like your answer." And he sat down.

Chief Charakterik dropped his buffalo-robe from his shoulders, to stand and speak.

"We hear your words," he said. "We thank you for the presents. We wish to ask where you are going from here?"

"We are going on, to explore the country and to smoke peace with the Ietans," replied Chief Pike.

"We knew that you were coming," spoke White Wolf. "The Spanish chief who was here said that you were coming. He said that the Americans were a small nation but greedy, and that soon they would stretch out even to the Pawnee, and claim the country. Now we see how truly the Spanish chief saw ahead, for here you are. We do not wish you to go on. We turned the Spanish back, until they should come again to live with us. We will turn you back. It is impossible for you to go on. You are few and you do not know the country. The Padoucah (Comanches) are many and powerful. They are our enemies and the friends of the Spanish and will kill you all. You must go back by the road that you came on."

The young Chief Mungo-Meri Pike stood up straighter still, and answered with ringing voice.

"I have been sent out by our great father to

travel through his country, to visit his red children, and talk peace. You have seen how I have brought the Osages and the Kansas together. I wish my road to be smooth, with a blue sky over my head. I have not seen any blood in the trail. But the warriors of the American father are not women, to be turned back by words. If the Pawnee wish to try to stop me, they may try. We are men, well armed, and will take many lives in exchange for our own. Then the great father will send other warriors, to gather our bones and to avenge our deaths, and our spirits will hear war-songs sung in praise of our deeds. We shall go on. I ask you for horses, and somebody who speaks Comanche, to help us; and I ask you to take down the Spanish flag and hoist the flag of your American father, instead."

That was a defiant speech, and Scar Head thrilled. Surely, the American chief was a man.

Iskatappe arose.

"We do not want peace with the Padoucah," he said. "They have killed six of our young men. We must have scalps in payment, so that the young men's relatives can wash the mourning paint from their faces and be happy. It would be foolish for us to send anybody with you or to give you horses.

We have been satisfied with our Spanish father. We do not wish so many fathers."

He sat down.

"That is true," Chief Pike retorted. "You do not wish many fathers. Now you have only the one great father. He is your American father. You have not answered me about the flag. I still see the Spanish flag flying at your door. I think you ought to lower that flag and put up this American flag, for I have told you that the Spanish do not rule this land any more. You cannot be children of two fathers, and speak with two tongues. I wish an answer."

Nobody said anything for a long time. The American chiefs sat there, gazing straight in front of them, and waiting. The blue eyes of Mungo-Meri Pike seemed to search all hearts. Was it to be peace or war? Then old Sleeping Bear, the head councillor of the Pawnee Republic, got up, without a word, and went to the doorway, and took down the Spanish flag from its staff, and brought it to Chief Pike. Chief Pike handed him the American flag, of red and white stripes like the sunset and the starry sky in one corner. Old Sleeping Bear carried it and fastened it to the staff.

The Osages and the Kansas grunted "Good," because they already had accepted the American

father; but the Pawnees hung their heads and looked glum. When the Spanish came back and found their great king's flag gone, what would they say?

Chief Pike saw the downcast faces, and read the thoughts behind them. His heart was big, after all, and he did not wish to shame the Pawnee nation, for he uttered, quickly:

"You have shown me that you are of good mind toward your father in Wash'ton. I do not seek to make trouble between you and the Spanish. We will attend to the Spanish. Should there be war between the white people, the wish of your American father is that his red children stay by their own fires and not take part. In case that the Spanish come and demand their flag, here it is. I give it to you. I ask that you do not put it up while I am with you, but that you keep the American flag flying."

"We thank you. We will do as you say," White Wolf responded; and every face had brightened. "In return, we beg you not to go on. You will lose your way. It will soon be winter, and you have no winter clothes, I see. The Spanish will capture you. If they do not capture you, the Padoucah will kill you. It will be pitiful."

Soon after this the council broke up. Chief Mungo-Meri Pike was still determined; he had not been frightened by the words. His men tried to

buy horses, but Chief White Wolf had the orders spread that no horses were to be supplied to the Americans. When some of the Pawnees went to the American camp, to trade, Skidi and two other "dog soldiers" or police followed them and drove them home with whips of buffalo-hide.

Iskatappe only waited for other orders, to muster the warriors and capture the camp.

"It can be done," he said. "We doubtless shall lose many men, for I think the Americans are hard fighters. We might do better to attack them on the march."

Some of the older men were against fighting.

"We should not pull hot fat out of the fire with our fingers, for the Spanish," they said. "Let the Spanish stop the Americans, if they can. We will stay at home and put up the flag of the stronger nation."

Meanwhile the young warriors liked to gallop near the American camp and shake their lances and guns at it. The American warriors laughed and shouted.

For the next few days Boy Scar Head was all eyes and ears. The Americans kept close in camp and were very watchful. Only Baroney the interpreter rode back and forth, looking for horses. Chief Charakterik seemed much troubled. He had

not counted upon the Americans being so stubborn. He sent the Kansas home. They had promised to guide the Americans; but he gave Wah-on-son-ga a gun and two horses, and told him that the Padoucahs would certainly kill everybody; so Wah-on-son-ga took his men home.

Frank, the Pawnee-who-had-been-to-Wash'ton, stole the wife of an Osage and ran away with her. This made the Osages angry; and now the Americans were getting angry, too.

They had found only three or four horses. Then—

"The Americans are going to march tomorrow!"

That was the word from the warriors who spied upon the camp. Chief Pike rode down, unafraid, with Baroney, to White Wolf's lodge. Scar Head hid in a corner, to hear what was said. He liked the crisp voice and the handsome face of this young Mungo-Meri Pike. Maybe he would never see him again.

"Why have you told the Kansas to go home, and made them break their promise to me?" demanded Chief Pike, of White Wolf.

"The hearts of the Kansas failed them. They decided they would only be throwing their lives

away, to go with such a small party into the country of the Padoucah," answered White Wolf.

"You frightened them with your stories," Chief Pike accused. "That was not right. I have come from your father, to make peace among his red children. Why do you forbid your men to trade us horses? You have plenty. Why do you not lend us a man who speaks the Ietan tongue, to help us?"

"If, as you say, we all are children of the American father, then we do not wish our brothers to give up their lives," White Wolf said. "But we do not know. The Spanish claim this country, too. They are coming back next spring. We promised them not to let you march through. You can come next spring and talk with them."

"No!" thundered Chief Pike. "We are going to march on. We are Americans and will go where we are ordered by the great father. The Osages have given us five of their horses. They have shown a good heart. I will speak well of them, to their father."

"They gave you their poor horses, because they got better ones from us," replied White Wolf.

"If the Pawnee try to stop us, it will cost them at least one hundred warriors," Chief Pike asserted. "You will have to kill every one of us, and we will die fighting. Then the American nation will send

such an army that the very name Pawnee will be forgotten." He arose, and his flashing blue eyes marked Boy Scar Head huddled upon a roll of buffalo-robes. "Who is that boy?" he asked.

"He is my son," Charakterik answered.

"He cannot be your son," reproved Chief Pike. "He is white, you are red. I think he is an American. Where did you get him?"

"He is my son. I have adopted him," White Wolf insisted. "I got him from the Utahs."

"Where are his parents?"

"I am his parent. I do not know anything more."

"You must give him up. He is not an Indian," said Chief Pike.

"He is a Pawnee. Why should I give him up?" argued Charakterik.

"Because the great father wishes all captives to be given up. The Potawatomi had many captives from the Osage. They have been given up. There cannot be good feeling between people when they hold captives from each other. I ask you to send this boy down river. Two French traders are in your town now. You can send the boy with them."

"I will think upon what you say," White Wolf replied.

So Chief Pike left.

"Why did you come in here to listen?" scolded White Wolf, of Scar Head. "You are making me trouble. Do you want to be sent away with those traders?"

"No," Scar Head admitted. For the two French traders were dark, dirty little men, not at all like the Americans. He preferred the Pawnees to those traders. But if he were an American, himself——? An American the same as the Pike Americans! That sounded good.

He could see that White Wolf was troubled; and the rest of the day he kept out of sight. Early in the morning the two French traders went away, but he had not been sent for. Chief Charakterik probably had matters of more importance to think about.

The Americans were breaking camp. The Pawnee young men, urged by Iskatappe and Skidi, were painting for battle, while the women filled the quivers and sharpened the lance points, and cleaned the guns afresh.

The sun mounted higher. A close watch was kept upon the American camp, plain in view up the Republican River. Shortly after noon the cry welled:

"They are coming! Shall we let them pass?"

"No! Kill them!"

"See where they are going, first."

"Wait till they are in the village."

Nobody knew exactly what to do. The Americans were marching down, their horses together, their ranks formed, their guns ready; and they looked small beside the four hundred and more warriors of the Pawnees. It was a brave act.

"They are not striking the village. They are going around," Rich Man shouted. "We shall have to fight them in the open. That is bad."

The young warriors like Skidi ran to and fro, handling their bows and lances and guns. They waited for orders from White Wolf; but White Wolf only stood at the door of his lodge, with his arms folded, and said nothing as he watched the American column.

Mungo-Meri Pike was smart. He acted like a war chief. He was marching around, far enough out so that if he were attacked the Pawnees could not hide behind their mud houses. Now to charge on those well-armed Americans, in the open, would cost many lives; and no Pawnee wished to be the first to fall.

The Americans had come opposite, and no gun had yet been fired, when on a sudden Chief Pike left

them. With Baroney and one soldier he galloped across, for the village. That was a bold deed, but he did not seem to fear. He paid no attention to the warriors who scowled at him. He made way through them straight to Chief Charakterik. He spoke loudly, so that all about might hear.

"I have come to say good-by. I hope that when we come again we will find the great father's flag still flying."

"You had better go quickly," White Wolf replied. "The Spanish will be angry with us, and my young men are hard to hold."

"We are going," Chief Pike assured. "We are going, as we said we would. If your young men mean to stop us, let them try. Two of our horses were stolen from us this morning. They were Pawnee horses. One was returned to us by your men. The other is missing. I am sure that the Pawnee do not sell us horses at a high price, so as to steal them. That is not honest. If you are a chief you will get the horse back for us, or the Pawnee will have a bad name for crooked tongues. So I will leave one of my men, who will receive the horse and bring it on. He will wait till the sun is overhead, to-morrow."

"I will see what I can do," White Wolf an-

swered. "The horse may have only strayed. A present might find him again."

"The horse is ours," reproved Chief Pike. "I shall not buy it twice. If the Pawnees are honest and wish to be friends with their American brothers, they will return the horse to me. I shall expect it, to-morrow. Adios."

"Adios," grunted White Wolf, wrapping his robe about him.

Chief Pike and Baroney the interpreter galloped for the column. They left the soldier. Now he was one American among all the Pawnees, but he did not act afraid, either.

He sat his horse and gazed about him with a smile. He was a stout, chunky man, in stained blue clothes. His face was partly covered with red hair, and the hair on his head, under his slouched black hat, was red, too. He carried a long-barreled heavy gun in the hollow of one arm.

"Get down," signed White Wolf. "Come into my lodge." And he waved the crowding warriors back.

The red-haired soldier got down and entered the lodge. Here he was safe. Everything of his was safe as long as he was a guest of a lodge. Scar Head slipped in after him, but White Wolf stayed outside.

"The American chief has lost a horse," he announced. "The horse must be brought back, or we shall have a bad name with our American father."

"If the American chief has lost a horse, let him promise a present and maybe it will be found," answered Skidi.

"That is no way to talk," Charakterik rebuked. "I want the horse brought to me; then we will see about the present."

"The present is here already," laughed Skidi. "It is in your lodge. The American chief would have done better to lose all his horses and say nothing, for a red scalp is big medicine."

And all the warriors laughed.

Inside the lodge the American soldier grinned at Scar Head. Scar Head grinned back.

"Hello," said the soldier.

Scar Head had heard that word several times. Now he blurted it, himself.

"H'lo."

This was the end of the conversation, but Scar Head did a lot of thinking. He well knew where the horse was. Skidi had stolen it and hidden it out, and boasted of his feat. Now Skidi was talking of keeping the red-hair. That did not seem right. The Americans were brave. If somebody—a boy—

should go out and bring the horse in, then Skidi might not dare to claim it, and White Wolf would send it and the red-hair on to Pike, and there would be no more trouble. Yes, being an American, himself (as they had said), Scar Head decided that he ought to help the other Americans.

He would get the horse.

IV

ON THE TRAIL OF THE SPANIARDS

EARLY in the morning, before yet even the squaws were stirring, Scar Head slipped out to get the horse. He found it picketed near the river, just where Skidi had cleverly concealed it. He led it in and tied it short, before the lodge door. Then he crept back to bed again. It would be safe, for nobody would dare remove it from the limits of the chief's lodge.

The squaws were up first, of course, to start the fires and prepare the breakfasts. Charakterik's two wives, an old one and a young one, arose and went outside. Lying quiet Scar Head heard them talking.

"Someone has brought a horse" said the young squaw. "It is a Pawnee horse."

"That is queer," said the old squaw. "Who is making White Wolf such a present? This must be the horse that was stolen from the Americans. The thief has changed his heart, and grown afraid."

"Or else it is a marriage gift," giggled the

young squaw. "Someone is looking for a wife in our lodge."

"Who is there, to be married?" the old squaw demanded.

"We are the only women, so it must be that someone is in love with me," the young squaw giggled again.

"You!" scoffed the old squaw. "Who would look at you? You are not worth a horse. No; the horse offering is made for me."

And they both laughed. They knew better than to rouse Charakterik and tell him. Their business was to get the breakfast, and let him discover the horse, himself.

White Wolf and the American soldier were still snoozing upon their buffalo-robe couches. Pretty soon Scar Head could wait no longer. He went outside, yawning and rubbing his eyes, and pretended to be surprised by the horse.

"Whose horse is that?" he queried.

"Ask it, and maybe you will know more than we do."

"Who brought it?'"

"That is none of our affair; nor of yours, either. It was here when we came out."

"It had not been here very long," added the

young squaw, to the elder. "See? The ground is only little trampled."

"If you want to know where it came from," continued the old squaw, to Scar Head, "you should trail it back, instead of asking silly questions."

"Yes, and get into trouble. A gift is a gift, and not to be doubted," the young squaw added.

At this, Scar Head ran off, to the river, for his morning swim. When he returned, Chief Charakterik and the American soldier were up and out, too, and surveying the horse.

"Do you know where this horse came from?" White Wolf questioned, of his wives.

"No. It was here. That is all."

"The man who stole the horse from the Americans has returned it," declared White Wolf. "Good. Is this the horse you are waiting for?" he asked, of the soldier.

The soldier did not understand the words, but he understood the gesture. Now he smiled and replied in his own language—which nobody else understood. But he nodded and pointed to the horse and in the direction of the Americans; and they all understood that.

"After you have eaten, you may take the horse and go your way," White Wolf bade, well satisfied.

So the matter seemed to be settled; but some-

how, Scar Head did not feel quite happy. The matter was settled too easily. In a few minutes the soldier would go; then all the Americans would be gone, and he himself would have lost them. In fact, he didn't seem to be getting much out of his scheme, except that he may have saved the soldier's scalp. Skidi would be angry, too, when he found out that the horse and soldier both had gone. Somebody would suffer—and Scar Head rather foresaw who that somebody might be! Skidi could make things very uncomfortable.

But before they were done eating, here came Skidi and several others, of the men, all furious.

"There is the horse," exclaimed Skidi. "And there is the red-haired white man. We are in time."

"What is all this shouting about?" reproved White Wolf. "This is no way to come to a chief's lodge."

"We come for a horse that has been stolen by that white man," Skidi boldly retorted. "There it is. We claim it."

"No. The horse belongs to the American chief. His soldier is here to get it. We talked about that yesterday. I will talk no more."

"I will talk, for I am a man," answered Skidi. "You let the white man eat at your fire and sleep in your lodge, and during the night he steals a horse.

Are you a chief, that you close your eyes to such things? We ask for our horse, or else a large present."

"Whose horse is it?"

"It is a Pawnee horse, and that is enough."

"The horse was not here last night, but it was here early this morning," announced White Wolf. "The American did not go out and get it. I am sure of that. If he did, why should he have brought it here, if he had stolen it? He could have easily made off with it, and others. No; the thief who took the horse from the Americans has returned it, as is right. Let the man who claims to own the horse come forward. But I think there is nothing more to be said."

The soldier was sitting, in his stained blue clothes, and gazing around with a good-natured smile on his hairy face; but Scar Head could see that he was thinking fast, and ready to spring for the lodge and his gun.

"Are you going to send him away with the horse?"

"Who owns the horse?" White Wolf replied. "Why was it left at my lodge door if not for the American to take with him? Somebody had bad dreams, and went and got the horse, so that he might sleep."

"In that case, the man deserves a present," Skidi declared. "Let a present be given in exchange for the horse and the American may go."

"To whom shall the present be given?" White Wolf inquired.

"I will take the present, and give it to the man who owns the horse," said Skidi. "But of course if he has done this good deed he may wish to be secret about it, and if he is accused of having done an evil deed in the first place, he does not wish to be pointed at as a thief."

"The American chief sent no present. He only asked for a horse that had been taken from him. Here it is, left on the prairie at my door, and I give it back to him."

With that, Chief Charakterik stood and folded his robe around him, as sign that he was done. The soldier rose, also.

But the squad led by Skidi murmured angrily. Somebody reached to grasp the horse's neck rope—

"No. Let him take it. He will not go far."

"There will be a red scalp, for a dance, to-night."

"The Americans will think the Pawnee are cowards, if all they need do is ask for a horse and get it."

"You talk like children," White Wolf reproved. "Who among you claims the horse? Nobody. Why

was it left at my door, if not for me? Or did it come of itself? It is mine and I can do with it as I please."

"But the present! You will shame all the town if you, a great chief, yield this way to the Americans. There is no proof that they have lost a horse, and why should you give one up to them, for nothing? You have no right to give the horse away until you find out why it was left at your lodge. You should wait and find out. People do not leave horses at lodges without expecting something in return. I may have left the horse, myself; and I might look for a present. Where is the present?"

Thus Skidi cunningly argued.

"Yes, where is the present?" they all demanded. "You need not make it, yourself. You can ask it from the Americans. Or tell the soldier to go; and if he doesn't like to go alone, we will help him on his way."

Scar Head suddenly spoke up.

"The American can have the horse, White Wolf. I brought it, and I want no present."

Everybody gaped. White Wolf turned on him severely.

"You? You are a boy. Why do you say the American can have the horse? If you brought it, where did you get it?"

"I found it."

"Whose horse is it?"

"It belongs to the American chief. It is the one he lost."

"How do you know?"

"I know," said Scar Head. "It was hidden, but I went and got it."

"You lie! You are a meddler!" Skidi stormed, furious. "Wait till I lay my hands on you."

"I do not lie. I brought the horse, and I can show where I found it," Scar Head answered.

"That is boy's talk," appealed Skidi. "Look at him! He is no Pawnee, as everybody knows. He is not even an Indian. Who can believe what he says? Are warriors to be ruled by a boy? I demand a council, on this horse—and I will attend to that piece of impudence when I catch him away from the lodge."

Chief Charakterik hesitated. Attracted by the loud voice of Skidi the village was gathering; Iskatappe had come, and Old Knife, and other leading men who were unfriendly to the Americans; and Scar Head felt small. Now Skidi had called for a council; and between the council and Skidi the red-haired soldier and he himself were likely to fare rather badly. Charakterik, too, looked angry. Only

the soldier stood smiling, backed against the lodge doorway, his gun in his hands.

But right in the midst of the crisis, somebody else arrived. It was Baroney, the interpreter for Chief Pike.

"Go into the lodge," ordered White Wolf, to Scar Head. "You have made bad work. I will talk with you later."

Scar Head went in, disgraced. Outside, the voices continued, with White Wolf, and Skidi, and Baroney doing most of the speaking, and Rich Man and Letalesha adding remarks.

After a short time they all quit. White Wolf entered, with Baroney and the soldier.

"You are going away," he said. "You may get your yellow pony and make ready."

"Where am I going?"

"With these two men, to the American camp. The horse matter is settled. The American chief has sent a present, for the horse. Everybody is satisfied. But you did a wrong thing, when you interfered in men's affairs. Why did you do that?"

"I like the Americans," Scar Head stammered.

"Yes," replied White Wolf. "What Skidi said is true. You are not red, you are white, and they all know it. You can never be an Indian. Now you have lost friends. The Pawnee will always look at

you sideways, and Skidi is likely to harm you. So I give you to the American chief, to be rid of you before you are hurt. He asked me to send you away. If I keep you it may mean trouble for me also. Get your horse. These two men are waiting."

His brain in a whirl, Scar Head hastened out, for his yellow pony. As he passed through the village, there were scowls and jeers, because now nobody respected him as the chief's son; but he did not care. He was an American, and these Pawnees were no longer his people. So he tried to walk fast, like an American, and pay no attention to the black looks and the slurs.

He rode back, on his pony. The two men were waiting, on their horses, with the other horse in tow. White Wolf's lodge received him kindly. His brother, White Wolf's real son, handed him a horn bow and otter-skin quiver of arrows.

"They are for you. Do not forget your brother."

The old squaw put new beaded moccasins upon his feet.

"They are for you. Do not forget your mother."

The young squaw clasped a silver bracelet upon his wrist.

"It is for you. Do not forget your sister."

White Wolf threw a white-tanned robe, soft and warm, from a young buffalo-cow, over his shoulders.

"Do not forget your father. You did wrong, but your heart was good. Remember that you have been a chief's son. Always bear yourself like a warrior. To a warrior, heat and cold and thirst and hunger are nothing. A brave man lives, while a coward dies. Now go."

"Come," said Baroney. The stocky soldier smiled brightly.

With never a backward glance they galloped out of the town, into the south and on.

Baroney began to lead. With the horse in tow, the soldier slackened, to ride alongside Scar Head. He grinned, and spoke.

"Hello," he said, again.

"H'lo," responded Scar Head.

The soldier rubbed his nose, as if figuring upon what to say next.

"American, you?" he queried.

Scar Head caught the word, and nodded. The soldier spoke farther, with another question.

"He asks your name," called back Baroney. "I will tell him. His name is Sparks. He is a good man. They are all good men. You will be happy with the Americans."

"Sparks!" That was a simple name and a

good one, because it fitted. Fire might be his medicine; the stiff bright hairs of his face were the red sparks, shooting out.

The American chief had camped at only a short distance from the Pawnee town, waiting on peace or war. There were shouts of welcome, for Baroney and Sparks, and many curious gazes for Scar Head. He rode proudly, on his yellow pony, with his warrior's bow and arrows, his chief-beaded moccasins, his bracelet and his white cow-robe. He was no longer afraid of the Americans. Baroney took him on to Chief Pike, who was standing beside his saddled horse.

The camp lodges had been struck, the Americans were ready to march.

Baroney explained to the young chief. Chief Pike listened—he nodded, and spoke, and with a smile reached to shake Scar Head's hand. The medicine man also spoke, and smiled, and shook hands. The young second chief came and did the same. Then they got on their horses.

"It is well," said Baroney to Scar Head. "You will ride in front, with the chiefs."

"Where do we go?"

"We go to the mountains, and to find the Ietans."

Scar Head said nothing, to that. It was a long way, and the danger way, but he was with braves

who seemed to feel no fears. They appeared to know what they were about.

Chief Pike shouted a command and led out. The second chief repeated the command, and turned in his saddle to see that it was obeyed; then he galloped to the fore. The two chiefs rode first, side by side. Baroney signed, and Scar Head found himself between Baroney and the medicine-man. Four Osages, still—Chief Pretty Bird, two warriors and a woman—followed. The American warriors trudged after, two by two, in a column, with the extra horses bearing packs.

The warriors numbered eighteen. It was a small party, for a great nation, when one remembered that the Spanish had sent several hundred and that the Padoucahs or Ietans (the Comanches) numbered thousands. The Osages of course need not be counted. The Pawnees thought little of Osages—a poor and miserable people.

The Spanish had left a very broad, plain trail. The Americans were following it, although it was an old trail and the Spanish chief had been gone several weeks. It stretched straight southward, toward the Kansas country, and the Padoucah and the Spanish country, beyond. If the young chief Pike followed far enough, in that direction, he would have need of all his medicine to get out again. But perhaps

he would turn west, in time, and aim for the unknown mountains, many days' journey—although what he expected to find there, nobody might say.

It was the home of the Utahs, who warred upon plains people and were friendly to only the Spanish.

He was a bold man, this young Chief Pike.

The march southward continued all day, pursuing the trail, until when the sun was getting low and the shadows long a place was reached where the Spanish had camped.

Chief Pike examined the signs. The Spanish of Chief Melgares had camped in a circle. There were fifty-nine burnt spots, from campfires. Allowing six warriors to each fire, that counted up over three hundred and fifty. The grasses had been eaten off by the horses.

Chief Pike led his eighteen warriors on a little distance, and ordered camp for the night beside a fork of the river of the Kansas. Scar Head was well treated; the American medicine man or "doctor" eyed him a great deal, but did him no harm; the warrior Sparks grinned at him, and beckoned to him, but he did not go. It was a cheerful camp, with the men singing and joking in their strange language.

He ate at the fire of the two chiefs and the medicine-man. They and Baroney the interpreter talked

together. Soon after dark everybody went to bed, except the guards, and except Chief Pike, who sat up, in his lodge, making black marks on white leaves, by the fire of a sputtering white stick!

Scar Head rolled in his buffalo robe, at one side of the lodge; the couch for the medicine-man (who was already on it) and for the chief, was at the other side. He stayed awake as long as he could, watching lest the medicine-man should try to feel of the spot on his head, again; but he was tired, and before the chief had finished making marks, he fell asleep.

V

THE CHASE OF THE BIG ELK

BANG!

One of the American guards, stationed on a little rise, had fired his gun, as an alarm signal.

It was noon, of the second day, and Chief Pike had halted his men to eat, and graze the horses. At the signal, everybody looked.

"Injuns!" cried the Americans, while the guard pointed and called.

Scar Head likewise looked.

"Pawnee," he said. He knew them instantly, although they were still far off.

Chief Pike and the young sub-chief shouted orders. The soldiers seized their guns and formed to protect the horses; the guards came running in. Scar Head strung his bow and plucked a good arrow from his quiver. The "doctor" or medicine-man, standing with gun in hand, smiled and asked him a question, in French.

"What are you doing? Making ready to fight?"

"Yes."

"Good," praised the medicine-man. "You will fight for the Americans?"

"I am American," asserted Scar Head. "American. No Pawnee."

The medicine-man laughed, but he seemed pleased.

There were many of the Pawnees—fully three hundred. They approached swiftly, across the rolling prairie, from the north. They were horseback, but they acted like a war party—all were warriors, with guns and bows and lances. What did they want? Even Scar Head could not guess. Had Charakterik decided to let the Americans be attacked? That was foolish. The Americans were ready, and would fight hard.

Or, perhaps Iskatappe and Skidi and other hot-hearts had planned this without permission, and were determined to see what they might do.

The Americans stood in a half circle, facing the Pawnees, their horses tied short, behind them. Chief Pike stood in front of the center, his sword in his hand. His sub-chief was at one end and the medicine-man at the other end. Scar Head fitted his arrow upon his bow, twitched his quiver around so that he might reach it more easily, and ran closer to the medicine-man's end, where he could shoot better. The soldier Sparks was here, too.

Iskatappe led the Pawnees. They were nearing fast. Yes, Skidi was among them. Scar Head de-

cided to loose his arrows upon Skidi, who had called him a liar and who was the mischief-maker. Now Chief Pike uttered a sharp command, and the gun-locks of the few Americans all clicked; he uttered another command, and the guns of the few Americans all rose to a level line. Scar Head lifted his bow and bent it, pointing his arrow upward, his eyes measuring the distance to Skidi.

But on a sudden the Pawnees stopped short, so that their ponies' forehoofs ploughed the sod, and Iskatappe and another chief rode forward more slowly, with the peace sign.

Chief Pike barked a command, so that the Americans' guns were lowered. Baroney went out and joined him, and they two met Iskatappe and the other chief.

After all, Iskatappe only gave Chief Pike a piece of meat. They rode in together, and the Pawnees came on, and the Americans let them.

"No war," smiled the medicine-man, over his shoulder, at Scar Head.

"Maybe," grunted Scar Head, but he was suspicious. When the Pawnees acted this way, they were of two minds. The Americans would do well to watch out. They did watch, but it was hard to keep so many Pawnees at a distance. They edged about, smiling and alert for chances.

"Hello, little sneak," greeted Skidi, of Scar Head.

"Hello, thief," Scar Head boldly answered. "You are the sneak. You give with one hand and take back with the other."

"You talk big," sneered Skidi. "Once you were a chief's son; now you are nothing. When I catch you, some day, you will be less than nothing."

"Why don't you catch me now?" Scar Head retorted. "I am with the Americans. I am not afraid of you."

"You are not worth the trouble. We are hunting meat. The Padoucah can have you and those Osages. They and the Spanish will eat you all, for us, and save us the bother. If we did not believe that, we would never have let the Americans come even this far."

It appeared to be true that the Pawnees were hunting, and not bent upon war. Iskatappe had brought Chief Pike a present of bear meat, to wipe out the memory of the horse-theft, he said. But the Americans stood ready, trying to see what the Pawnees really were up to—and Scar Head kept his eye upon the crafty Skidi.

Pretty soon Chief Pike and Iskatappe shook hands again. The Pawnees were to ride one way, the Americans another. Scar Head was just in time.

As the Americans started, he brushed against the medicine-man, so as to warn, with his French words:

"Knife. No knife."

The medicine-man instantly felt of the knife scabbard on his saddle. It was empty, as Scar Head well knew, for he had seen the clever Skidi steal the knife out. Now the "doctor" exclaimed, and spoke quickly to Chief Pike. They both reined aside, so did Baroney the interpreter—

"Come," beckoned the medicine-man, to Scar Head; and while the column went on with the second chief, they turned back to the Pawnees.

"We have come for a knife that is lost," announced Chief Pike, to Iskatappe, with Baroney talking for him in bad Pawnee.

"We know nothing about any knife," asserted Rich Man, stiffly.

"A knife is missing from this man's saddle," Chief Pike insisted. "I ask you to get it for me."

"You grow angry about a very small thing," Iskatappe replied. "What is one knife to you? Besides, you say it is lost. Very well; then you should find it. We know nothing about it."

Chief Pike flushed, angry indeed. His blue eyes looked hot.

"Whether or not it is a small thing, we Americans are not men who can be robbed. The knife may

seem of little value, but it is ours. I am here to get it from you."

"That is strong talk," Iskatappe answered. "I have no knife of yours. Where is your knife?"

"Who has it?" the medicine-man asked, in quick low voice, of Scar Head.

"Skidi," whispered Scar Head.

The medicine-man pushed forward to Baroney, and spoke with him.

"This man says your warrior named Skidi has his knife," said Baroney, to Iskatappe.

"We will see," replied Iskatappe. He called Skidi, and told him to throw back his robe; and sure enough, there was the knife.

"I did not know that it was that man's knife," Skidi defended. "I found it on the trail. Now it is mine. If I give it up, I must have another to take its place."

"Your warrior lies," Chief Pike flatly retorted, to Iskatappe. "He stole the knife. Otherwise, how did we know that he had it?"

Matters looked bad. The Pawnees were surrounding thicker and thicker, and the other Americans had gone on. But Chief Pike gave no sign that he was afraid; neither did the medicine-man. Only Baroney acted uneasy, and Scar Head's heart beat rapidly.

"What the American chief says, sounds true," remarked Iskatappe, while Skidi glared and his friends jostled and murmured. "But maybe Skidi is right, too. He should have another knife."

"We are not here to trade knives. When an honest man finds what belongs to another, he returns it," Chief Pike replied.

"Much time is being wasted over a matter of no account," growled Iskatappe. "Here is your knife," and he plucked it from Skidi's waist. "I am not stingy, so I give him one to take its place." And so he did.

Chief Pike passed the knife to the medicine-man. The medicine-man was wise. He immediately passed it back to Iskatappe.

"It is now yours. Keep it. By this you see that we did not come for the knife; we came for justice."

"You show us that your hearts are good, after all," Rich Man granted. "I think you have done well."

The faces of the Pawnees cleared, even Skidi seemed satisfied, and after shaking hands once more Chief Pike led out for the column and left the Pawnees to go their way also.

The Americans under the second chief were a long way ahead. Chief Pike acted as if in no hurry. He and the medicine-man cantered easily and chatted

and laughed like brothers; Scar Head and Baroney cantered together, behind them.

"Our scalps were loose, back there," uttered Baroney.

"Yes," said Scar Head. "I smelled blood."

"You are no Pawnee. They would scalp you, too. Were you afraid?"

"No. No one is afraid, with Chief Pike."

Baroney laughed. He was a small, dark, black-bearded man who spoke about as much Pawnee as Scar Head spoke French, but was good at the sign language; so by using all three means, with now and then a word of Spanish, he got along.

They had ridden about a mile, and were slowly overtaking the American column, when another band of figures came charging. The medicine-man sighted them, the first, for he pointed—and they indeed looked, at a distance, to be more Indians, issuing from ambush in a river bottom on the left and launching themselves to cut off the Chief Pike squad.

Scar Head himself read them with one keen stare.

"Elk," he grunted, in Pawnee, and stiffened with the hunt feeling.

Baroney called, excitedly; but Chief Pike had read, too. He shouted, turned his horse and shook his reins and flourished his gun, and away he dashed, to meet the elk. In a flash Scar Head clapped his

heels against his pony's ribs, and tore after. The medicine-man and Baroney tore, too, on a course of their own.

The yellow pony was a fast pony, well trained. He had been stolen from the Comanches, whose horses were the best. Scar Head rode light—a boy in only a buffalo robe. The American horses all were poor horses, even those traded for with the Pawnees, and Chief Pike, in his clothes, weighed twice as much, on the saddle, as Scar Head.

The yellow pony over-hauled the Chief Pike horse—crept up, from tail to stirrup, from stirrup to neck, from neck to nose. Scar Head, his moccasined feet thrust into thong loops, clung close. Chief Pike glanced aside at him, with blue eyes glowing, and smiled.

"Good meat," he said, in French. "We two hunt."

"Kill," answered Scar Head.

"Can you kill?"

"Yes."

"What with?"

"This." And Scar Head shook his strung bow.

Chief Pike laughed.

"They are large; you are small. With a gun—yes. With a bow—I think not."

"You will see," Scar Head promised. His heart

was filled with the desire to prove himself to Chief Pike. But he had never killed an elk—nothing larger than a badger; he only knew that it might be done.

They raced. The elk were foolish things, and appeared to be thinking more of some danger behind than the danger before. No—now Baroney and the medicine-man had frightened them afresh, for they had swerved, they paralleled the trail, and were scouring on to gain the open.

Good riding might head them.

The yellow pony knew. He ran like a deer, himself. Chief Pike's horse lengthened bravely.

"Hi! Hi!" Scar Head urged.

"Hurrah!" cheered the chief.

They were veering in. The band of elk were led by a splendid buck, whose horns branched like a tree. The elk chief ran with his nose out and his horns laid upon his neck, but now and again he shook his head, and his horns tossed.

Baroney and the medicine-man were trying to close in, on the rear flank—the medicine-man had shot. Scar Head belabored his pony harder. The wind whistled in his ears, his white robe had dropped about his thighs, he rode with his legs and notched an arrow upon his bow-string. His eyes were upon the elk chief, and he almost lost sight of Chief Pike,

although he knew that Pike was thudding close beside him.

The reports of the medicine-man and Baroney guns sounded, driving the elk before them. The elk chief saw the two enemies cutting him off before. He recoiled sharply, to turn, but the herd forced him on; they all bunched, confused. This was the chance, and in charged Scar Head, on his yellow pony.

"Le grand cerf (The large stag)!" Chief Pike gasped.

"Oui (yes)!" answered Scar Head.

The herd broke. On bolted the stag, tossing his great horns. After him pelted Scar Head and Chief Pike. It was another chase. But, see! The Pawnees were coming, from before. The chase was leading straight for them, they had seen, and fifty or sixty of their best hunters had galloped in a long line, for a surround.

The stag saw, too. Or else he smelled. He turned at right angles, to escape the net. A minute or two more, and the yellow pony was at his straining haunches, and Scar Head was leaning forward with bow bent to the arrow's head.

"Look out! Look out!" Chief Pike shouted.

With a mighty leap the stag sprang aside, whirled, and charged the yellow pony. His bristling

horns were down, his eyes shone greenly. Around whirled the yellow pony, also, and scrambled for safety. Scar Head, clinging and urging, gazed backward and laughed to show that he was not afraid. Chief Pike, his pistol held high, pursued, to the rescue.

But the elk chief changed heart. The yellow pony nimbly dodged, and he went on. Scar Head closed in on him once more. Chief Pike was coming; the arrow should be sped now or never.

The elk chief was spattered with froth from shoulder to haunch; his great horns, polished at the tips but still ragged with their velvet, lay flat, reaching to his back. Scar Head forged on farther and farther, his bow arched from arrow notch to arrow point; he leaned, aimed quickly, and loosed. It was a warrior's bow, and the recoil jarred his whole arm, but the arrow had sunk to its feathers in the right spot, just behind the elk's fore shoulder.

"Hi!" cheered Scar Head. He whipped another arrow from his quiver; without slackening speed he fitted it to the bow.

The elk chief had given a tremendous bound; for a moment it seemed as though he would get away yet. On thudded the yellow pony, in the rear at the other side on thudded Chief Pike, ready to use his pistol.

WHANG! IT BURIED ITSELF ALMOST OUT OF SIGHT BEHIND THE ELK CHIEF'S RIBS

Before, the Pawnees were yelling. Scar Head feared that he was going to lose his kill to them, or to Chief Pike. That would never do. He kicked his pony fiercely. Ha! The old chief was failing, as the arrow point worked. The pony drew up on him. Now another arrow. Whang! It buried itself almost out of sight behind the elk chief's ribs.

The elk chief bounded high, screamed, turned blindly, and with one more bound crashed headlong to the ground. The yellow pony leaped right across him as he struggled to rise. But he rose only half way, still screaming with rage. Then, just as Chief Pike arrived, and Scar Head, twisting the yellow pony, leveled a third arrow, he collapsed, gushing blood from his mouth, and quivered and died.

Scar Head yelled the scalp halloo. He had killed the elk chief, a mighty animal indeed.

Chief Pike, out of breath, swung his hat and cheered, too. He got off his horse, and walked around the elk, examining it. He examined the arrow wounds, with the reddened feather tips just showing.

"That was well done," he said.

Scar Head sat happy, breathing fast. The scar under his white mark throbbed and burned, as it always did when he worked hard or played hard, but

he was happy. His heart glowed at the praise by Chief Pike. He felt like a man.

"Yours," he panted. "I kill. You keep."

"It is much meat," replied Chief Pike.

Baroney and the medicine-man were chasing hither-thither. The Pawnees were killing. Chief Pike galloped away to see. But he would see no arrows buried deeper than these.

After the hunt was over, the Pawnees cut up their animals, and the Pike party cut up the big elk. With Scar Head riding proudly, they four caught the column under the second chief. The camp feasted, this night, upon a spot where the Spanish also had camped. There was only one alarm call, from the guard, on account of two Pawnees who came in by mistake. They had not eaten for three days and thought that this was a camp of their own people.

Chief Pike sent them out again, with food for a sick comrade. He was kind as well as brave.

VI

LIEUTENANT WILKINSON SAYS GOOD-BY

"CHIEF PIKE asks you to go back with one man and find John Sparks."

These were the words of Baroney, to Scar Head, who was just finishing breakfast so as to be ready to march.

A number of days had passed since the elk hunt, and several things had happened. Although the Americans were brave, the Great Spirit seemed to be angry with them for marching through the country. He gave them hungry camps, without wood and water. He sent rain on them, and made them sick. Chief Pretty Bird and another Osage man had left. They said that they wanted better hunting —but it was plain that they were afraid. And on the same day the Spanish trail had been blotted out by buffalo hoofs, and the Americans had lost it.

By the talk, this was bad. According to what Scar Head understood, Chief Pike depended upon the Spanish trail to guide him by the best road into the south and to the Comanches. The Spanish knew this country better than the Americans did.

The rain kept falling, and the men straggled. Yesterday afternoon the warrior Sparks had dropped behind. He had pains in his joints, which the medicine-man had not been able to cure: "rheumatism." He could not ride a horse and he could scarcely walk, using his gun as a crutch. Last night he had not come into camp. The Spanish trail was lost, again; and Sparks was lost, too.

Scar Head was glad to go back and look for him. He liked Sparks. He liked all the men and was getting to know them by their names: queer names. Each man had two—one for each other and one for the chiefs. There was "Jake" and "Carter"; the same man. And "Jerry" and "Jackson"; and "Tom" and "Dougherty"; and "John" and "Brown"; and "Hugh" and "Menaugh"; and "Bill" and "Meek"; and "Joe" and "Ballenger"; and the others. The last two were head warriors, called "sergeant." The medicine-man's names were "John" and "Doctor Robinson." The second chief's names were "the left'nant" and "Lieutenant Wilkinson." Chief Pike was "the cap'n" and "Lieutenant Pike."

The warriors spoke only American, but they knew Indian ways. The most of them, Baroney said, had been on a long journey before with Lieutenant

Pike, far into the north up a great river, into the country of the Sioux.

The medicine-man, Doctor Robinson, was popular, but he was not a chief. The men did not seem to fear him. He rode well and shot well. Lieutenant Pike and he rode and hunted together, while the second chief, Lieutenant Wilkinson, stayed with the men. Scar Head also had grown not to fear the medicine-man, who frequently asked him about his white spot and where he had come from, to the Utahs and Pawnees, and tried to teach him American words.

Some of the American words were hard and some easy. On some days they were harder than on other days; and again Scar Head suddenly spoke words that he didn't know at all—they arrived to him of themselves. That was odd. He was getting to be an American; he felt as though he had been an American in his heart all the time, but that his heart had been shut up. The times when his spot throbbed and burned were the times when he knew the fewest words.

The men had given him a new name. His Pawnee name was not good enough for them. The new name was "Stub." John Sparks had told him of it, first, by saying it.

"Hello, Stub? How goes it, Stub?"

And the other men laughed and repeated:

"Here, Stub."

"Hello, Stub!"

"You're the boy, Stub."

"What is 'Stub'?" he asked, of the medicine-man, Doctor Robinson.

"It is 'short,' 'cut off,' coupé," carefully explained the medicine-man. "They like you. It is a good name, because you are small."

"American?"

"Yes."

"Sure, an' we mane no harm, doctor, sir," called "Tom," whose other name was Dougherty. "If sawed-off he is, a rale little man he is, too."

And while Scar Head (whose other name was now "Stub," in American language) did not understand all those words, he knew that they were kindly spoken. So his name pleased him.

John Brown was the man who rode with him to look for Sparks. They took the back trail and rode for a long time. Everything was wet from the rains. Sparks must have spent a miserable night, alone on the prairie, without food or fire. Finally they saw him, far ahead, hobbling slowly, trying to catch up with the march.

He grinned when they met him, and shouted cheerfully, although he made faces.

"Mornin' to ye, boys. 'Rah for Stub!"

"H'lo, John. No walk; ride. My pony." And Stub sprang off.

"Can you ride, John?" asked John Brown.

"Sure, I'll try. At this rate I dunno whether I'm goin' or comin'. You'll all be to the mountains an' back ag'in before I ever ketch up. Hey, Stub?"

But Stub might only smile.

With many grunts and awkward movements John Sparks climbed aboard the yellow pony. It was near noon when they brought him into the camp.

Lieutenant Pike and Doctor Robinson had been hunting for the Spanish trail, again, but had not found it. There was talk of a large river, the Arkansaw, somewhere southward yet. The Americans were anxious to reach the river, which would guide them; but they had lost the trail to it.

After eating, they made another march. When the sun was low, Lieutenant Pike pointed to some trees a long way ahead and told Lieutenant Wilkinson to march the men to that place. He beckoned to Stub.

"Come with me?" he asked.

Stub nodded. He and Lieutenant Pike and Doctor the medicine-man went off by themselves, scouting up a creek. Lieutenant Pike was still looking for the Spanish trail.

They all looked and looked, but did not cross it. The lieutenant sighted some buffalo; he and the medicine-man gave chase, and before Stub reached them they had killed two. That was good. They took the tongues, and left a coat on the carcasses, to keep the wolves away; but when the three rode hard, to get to camp before dark, there was no camp. The Lieutenant Wilkinson men had not gone to the trees. Now everybody was lost!

After searching about and speaking angrily, Lieutenant Pike ordered camp. It was lucky that they had taken the buffalo tongues, because now they might make a fire and cook the tongues.

What had become of the Lieutenant Wilkinson men seemed very queer. Early in the morning Lieutenant Pike led up the creek, from the trees, and did not find them. The three arrived at the spot where the two buffalo carcasses were lying. The wolves were eating the carcasses, in spite of the coat, but there were marrow bones left. Next, the lieutenant led down the creek. Not even the smoke of any campfires might be seen, and there were no pony tracks or footprints.

Stub used all his eyes, but discovered nothing. At night the lieutenant and the doctor were much worried.

"Injuns, mebbe?" Stub asked.

Lieutenant Pike nodded gravely.

"I fear so. We will hunt more to-morrow."

That night it rained, and in the morning was still raining, cold. But they had had plenty to eat. This day they rode and rode, up the creek again, in the rain.

"It is bad," said the doctor. "A long way from home. Only four shots left. No trail, no men, nada (nothing). Indian country. We look one more day; then we find the river Arkansaw."

"Go to 'Nited States?" Stub queried.

"Cannot tell. The Great Father sent us out. We are men; we hate to go back."

"Mebbe they there, on Arkansaw. Injuns chase 'em."

"Maybe. But it is bad. Maybe Injuns chase us, next."

"We fight," declared Stub.

And the doctor laughed.

"You're all right. We'll do our best, eh?"

Stub had ten arrows; the lieutenant and the medicine-man each had four loads for their guns. That was not much, in a fight.

Early in the morning they again rode, searching up the creek, with their eyes scanning before and behind and right and left. When the sun was half-

way to noon, they saw two horsemen, coming from the south. Indians? No! White men—soldiers!

Lieutenant Pike cried gladly, and fired his gun, in signal. His face had been dark and stern; now it lighted up, and they all galloped for the two men. Lieutenant Wilkinson was only three miles south, on the Arkansaw.

"What! The Arkansaw?" Lieutenant Pike repeated.

"Yes, sir. It is right close."

"Have you found the Spanish trail?"

"No, sir. But we found the river."

The two soldiers guided. When they drew near where the river was, Lieutenant Wilkinson galloped out. By the way in which he shook hands with his chief and with the doctor, he, too, had been worried.

"Sure, we thought you were lost or scalped," said John Sparks, to Stub, in camp .

"No lost; you lost," answered Stub.

"Well, depends on how you look at it," agreed John Sparks, scratching his red hair.

The river was a wide river, flowing between cottonwood trees. The country was flat, and the trees had hidden the size of the river. The men began to look for trees to make boats of. Did this mean that Chief Pike was going to travel on by boat? Baroney explained.

"Lieutenant Wilkinson travels down river by boat. The captain takes men and marches to the Comanches."

"Lieutenant Wilkinson, how far?" Stub asked.

"Very far, to the American forts at the mouth of the river, and to report to the American father."

"Captain Pike, how far?"

Baroney shrugged his shoulders.

"Who knows?"

Stub made up his mind what *he* was going to do.

Lieutenant Pike moved the camp to the other side of the river, where the best boat-trees grew. The river was rising fast, from the rains, and everybody had to swim and arrived very wet. Rain fell almost all the time, but it was a good camp, with plenty of wood and meat.

While the men under Lieutenant Wilkinson cut down trees Chief Pike and the doctor medicine-man scouted up and down the river, hunting meat and the Spanish trail. There were buffalo and antelope, but there was no Spanish trail.

Lieutenant Pike grew curious about the wish-ton-wish, or prairie dogs. He found a large town of them, where the rattle-snakes and the tortoise lived, too. He and the doctor shot them, to eat, and they were good—as Stub well knew. It took true

shooting, because unless a wish-ton-wish is killed dead, he crawls into his hole.

The wish-ton-wish is among the smartest of animals. He digs his hole cunningly. The lieutenant and the doctor tried to fill one hole with water, and get the wish-ton-wish that way. Stub said, "No use"—he and the Pawnee boys had tried it often. And the men found out that this was true, for they spent a long time and poured in one hundred and forty kettles of water, and it all disappeared but no wish-ton-wish came out.

Still, the towns were interesting places, where the dogs sat up straight with their hands across their stomachs, and held councils, like people, and whistled "Wish-ton-wish (Look out)!" whenever an enemy was sighted.

A great deal of buffalo-meat was dried, for Lieutenant Wilkinson to take. Making the boats required several days. The trees were too small and soft. When one boat had at last been hollowed the men started to build another out of buffalo and elk hides, stretched over a frame.

On the night before Lieutenant Wilkinson was to leave, Chief Pike the captain said to Stub:

"Come here. Listen."

"What?"

"To-morrow you go with Lieutenant Wilkinson."

"No," answered Stub. He had been afraid of that.

"Yes. You go with him, to the United States. That is best."

"No." And Stub shook his head.

"Why not?'

"No go. Stay with you."

"Don't you want to be an American, and see the towns of the Great Father?"

"Be an American here," answered Stub.

"We do not stay here. We go on, a long way, up the river, to the mountains."

"Yes," said Stub.

"You will be cold."

"Don't care."

"You will be hungry."

"Don't care."

"We may all die."

"Don't care."

"The Osage were afraid. The Pawnee were afraid. You are not afraid?"

"No. No Osage, no Pawnee; American. March, hunt, fight, stay with you," Stub appealed, eagerly.

The doctor medicine-man laughed, and clapped him on the shoulder.

"Good. Let him come, lieutenant."

"He may come," replied the lieutenant. And Stub's heart beat gladly.

Baroney and John Sparks and Tom Dougherty and John Brown and others of his friends were coming, too. Had he been sent away with Lieutenant Wilkinson, in the boat, for the United States, he would have run off at his first chance and followed the Pike trail.

Right after breakfast in the morning camp was broken. It had been a very cold night, with snow, and ice floated thickly down the swollen river. But by help of the Wilkinson boats Lieutenant Pike moved his men and baggage across the river again, to the north side which everybody said was the American side. The men worked hard, to load the boats and swim the horses, in the slush and ice. Then Lieutenant Wilkinson made ready to start.

He took with him, in his two boats, one of the head soldiers, Sergeant Joe Ballenger; the soldiers John Boley, Sam Bradley, Sol Huddleston, and John Wilson; the Osage man and woman who had come this far, and corn and meat for twenty-one days.

Head soldier Sergeant Bill Meek marched the Pike men up-river, but Stub stayed with Lieutenant

Pike, the doctor, and Baroney, to see the Wilkinson men leave. He had no fear of being put aboard, now, for Chief Pike always spoke the truth.

Lieutenant Wilkinson shook hands all 'round, stepped into the boat, made of four buffalo hides and two elk hides, and with his crew pushed off, after the other boat. The floating ice did not matter.

Lieutenant Pike watched them out of sight, in a bend. Then he turned his horse toward the west.

"Come," he said.

He and Doctor Robinson led; Baroney and Stub followed.

"Now to the mountains," cheered Baroney. "Huzzah!"

"Huzzah!" Stub echoed.

The mountains were far, through Comanche country, maybe through Spanish country, perhaps into Utah country; and after that, what? Nobody had said. Winter was here, as if the Great Spirit were still angry. The men had shivered, this morning, in their thin clothes; but nobody had seemed to care. Young Chief Wilkinson, with a few men, was going one way, on an unknown trail; young Chief Pike, with the rest of the men, was going the other way, on another unknown trail. So, huzzah! To be an American one must be brave.

VII

"THE MOUNTAINS! THE MOUNTAINS!"

THE Spanish trail again! They struck it toward evening of the day after Lieutenant Wilkinson had left—and they struck it just in time, too. Snow was falling once more, and dusk was at hand.

The trail came in from the north, and crossed the river. Lieutenant Pike ordered camp made. Then he and the doctor forded the river, through the floating ice, to see where the trail went on the other side.

They returned in the dark. They had lost the trail, among the buffalo tracks, but were going to try again in the morning.

"We'll have to take Stub, and use his eyes, too," said the doctor.

This was another cold night. The snow had quit, after falling two inches deep. The horses groaned, where they were picketed to graze; before rolling themselves in their blankets and buffalo robes, on the ground, the men huddled about their fires. There were now thirteen soldiers, and Chief Pike, the doctor, Baroney and Stub.

"Heap winter, b' gorry; eh?" spoke Pat Smith, to Stub, and holding his hands to the blaze.

Stub gravely nodded.

"Winter come soon," he answered.

"An' aren't ye cold, boy?" queried John Sparks. "In only your skin an' a buff'lo robe?"

"No cold," Stub asserted. That was all the Pawnees wore. He was used to it.

The day dawned clear. After eating, Sergeant Meek marched the men up along the river. With Lieutenant Pike and the doctor, Stub crossed to help find the Spanish trail. They had to break a way through the ice. The ice cut the horses' legs, the stinging water splashed high, soaking moccasins and drenching the lieutenant and the doctor above the knees. The lieutenant wore thin blue cotton leggins—a sort of trousers called overalls; now these clung to him tightly.

Stub rather preferred his own skin, for it shed water.

The Spanish had camped over here. There were lots of horse sign showing through the snow, in a space of more than a mile. The Spanish seemed to have grown in numbers. It was an old camp, and the trail out of it had been flattened by buffalo tracks, and by the snows and rains. So they three—Lieutenant Pike, the doctor, and Stub—made circles, as they rode up river, to cut the trail farther on.

They did not find it until noon. But they found

something else: Indian signs which were not older than three days. A party of warriors were ahead. Stub picked up a worn moccasin: "Pawnee—Grand Pawnee," he announced, when he handed it to the lieutenant. "War party. All on foot. Mebbe so many." And he opened and shut his fingers five times.

The lieutenant and the doctor examined the moccasin. After that they rode more rapidly, as if anxious to get to their soldiers.

The soldiers also had crossed the river, on account of bad travel, and were camped on this, the south side. In the morning they all marched by the Spanish trail, along the river, into the west, over a country covered with salt. There were more Indian signs. It looked as though twenty warriors had been marching in the same direction only a short time before; and fresh horse tracks pointed down river.

Whether the Indians were the same Pawnees or not, was hard to tell. But the horse tracks looked to be wild-horse tracks.

"Sure, wouldn't it be fun to ketch a few o' them wild hosses, Stub, lad?" proposed John Sparks, in camp. "We need 'em. Would ye know how?"

"Chase 'em, with rope. Chase 'em all day, make tired, mebbe no ketch 'em," Stub answered.

"Or if ye shoot one jest right, through the nape

o' the neck an' graze the nerve there, ye'll down him like as if lightning struck him an' he won't be hurt," asserted Hugh Menaugh.

"Yes, but it takes mighty fine shootin'," said soldier Bill Gordon. "You're like to kill him, or miss him complete."

The wild horses were sighted the next evening, from camp on an island where there was wood and shelter. The lieutenant and the doctor and Baroney had come in with two antelope that they had killed among their own horses, while they themselves were lying on the ground and resting. They might have killed more, but they did not need the meat. Now while spying on the country around, through his long glass, the lieutenant saw a bunch of moving figures out there on the prairie, north of the river.

Indians? No—wild horses, more than one hundred! Good! Out he went, and the doctor, and Baroney, and Stub followed, to get a nearer view.

They were of many colors, those wild horses—blacks and browns and greys and spotted. They waited with heads high, as curious as if they had never seen men before. Then they came charging, in a broad front, and their hoofs drummed like thunder. Only a short way off they stopped, to start and snort.

"Ma foi, quelle beauté (My gracious, how beautiful)!" cried Baroney.

"Try to crease that black, lieutenant," the doctor proposed.

The lieutenant rested his gun upon his empty saddle, took long aim, and fired. But he did not stun the black—he missed him entirely—he had not dared to draw fine enough.

At that, around the wild horses wheeled, as if by command, and pelted off, to halt and gaze again.

"To-morrow we'll see if we can run some down," said the lieutenant. "Shall we, Stub?"

"Pawnee sometimes run all day. Mebbe ketch one, mebbe not. Too swift, have too much wind."

"Well, we can try," laughed the doctor.

The camp was excited, to-night, with the thought of catching wild horses. The men busied themselves tying nooses in their picket ropes.

"But we haven't a critter that could ketch a badger," John Sparks complained; "unless it be the doctor's black an' that yaller pony o' Stub's."

Stub doubted very much whether his yellow pony would amount to anything, in racing wild horses. The Pawnees always used two or three horses, each, so as to tire the wild horses out.

However, the lieutenant was bound to try. In the morning he picked out the six best horses, which

included the yellow pony, and appointed the riders. They were himself, the doctor, Baroney, soldier John Sparks, soldier Freegift Stout, and Stub. Only Baroney and Stub had seen wild horses chased before.

All the camp, except the camp guards, followed. The wild horses were in about the same place, a mile distant. They waited, curious, pawing and snorting and speaking to the tame horses, until within short bow shot, or forty steps. On a sudden they wheeled.

"After 'em!" the lieutenant shouted.

"Hooray!"

Ah, but that was sport! Stub's yellow pony sprang to the fore; he was nimble and he carried light. No—another horse and rider forged alongside him. They were the medicine-man and his black; a good rider and a good horse.

Stub hammered and yelled. "Hi! Hi! Hi!" The doctor lashed and yelled. Already they had gained the heels of the flying herd. The clods of earth thrown by the rapid hoofs bombarded them lustily. Baroney and soldier Sparks and soldier Stout, and even the lieutenant had been dropped behind

But working hard, they two never got quite far enough in, to cast the ropes. The wild horses were playing with them. After about two miles the yel-

low pony and the doctor's horse began to wheeze and to tire; the wild band were running as strongly as ever—only romping along, biting and kicking at each other. Then as if to show what they really could do, led by their black stallion, they lengthened their strides, opened the gap wider and wider, and were away.

The doctor hauled short.

"No use, Stub," he called.

So Stub pulled down, and turned.

"No use," he agreed. "But heap fun."

"You bet!" pronounced the doctor, panting. "What do you say 'heap' fun for? That's not American; that's Injun. Americans say 'much' fun, or 'great' fun."

"All right," Stub admitted—for the doctor knew. "Heap chase wild horse, much fun."

"Oh, pshaw!" the doctor laughed. "If I could only get into that head of yours I'd take the 'heaps' out of it. How's your white spot, these days? Burn any?"

"Some days burn, some days no. Some days heavy, some days light." And with that, Stub kept his distance. He wished that the doctor would quit talking about "getting into" his head. A medicine-man had dangerous power.

The lieutenant and Baroney and the two soldiers

had come as fast as they could. There was a great deal of laughing and joking as the doctor and Stub joined them, and all rode back for the main party, and camp. The lieutenant joked the least. He never did joke much, anyway; he was stern and quiet.

"We'll delay no more for wild horses, men," he said. "Our Country expects something better of us than such child's play at the impossible. Forward again, now. We will hunt only for food, in line of duty."

This afternoon they marched thirteen miles.

The Spanish trail continued, up the river, and ever westward. It was a pity that some of the wild horses had not been caught, for the other horses were beginning to give out. The grass was short and thin, and eaten off by the buffalo, and at night the men cut cottonwood boughs for the horses to feed upon.

This was a rich meat country, though. Buffalo were constantly in sight, by the thousand, many of them fat cows, and the hunters brought in humps and tongues. The Spanish had left camp signs—at one camp almost one hundred fires might be counted, meaning six hundred or seven hundred warriors. A whole Spanish army had been through here, but the lieutenant and his little army of sixteen marched on.

There were several old camp-places of Indians. One showed Comanche signs; near by, the Spanish also had camped, as if making ready to meet the Comanches, and Baroney and the lieutenant thought that the Comanche range must be close at hand.

But where were the mountains? How far were the mountains, now? The river was getting narrower and deeper, the country higher and rougher. Two horses became so weak that they could not carry their packs. The horses had been traveling, starved and foot-sore, under heavy loads more than twenty miles a day.

John Sparks, who had been out hunting, returned with news.

"I sighted an Injun hossback," he reported. "He made off up a little ravine south of us. Don't know whether he saw me or not."

Before night fresh moccasin tracks not over a few hours old were discovered. A large war party were somewhere just ahead. This night the camp guards were doubled, but nothing happened.

In the morning the lieutenant took the doctor, John Sparks, and Stub for interpreter, and circled south, to find the lone horseman. Only his tracks were found; so they rode back again and the column marched on.

Nothing special occurred today, but everybody

kept sharp lookout. The country was lonely, broken by rocky spurs and uplifts, and the buffalo herds seemed to be less in number.

The next day the lieutenant and the doctor led, as usual, with Baroney and Stub behind them, and the column of toiling men and horses under Sergeant Meek, following. The two weak horses had fallen down, to die, and another was barely able to walk.

Lieutenant Pike frequently used his spy-glass, which made things ten miles off appear to be only a few steps. In the middle of the day he halted and leveled it long.

"Sees something," said Baroney, in French.

In a moment the lieutenant galloped forward to the doctor, who had gone on, and they both looked. But they did not signal, and they did not come back; so what it was that they thought they saw, nobody knew. Stub and Baroney strained their eyes, seeking. Aha!

"Smoke sign," uttered Baroney.

"Heap smoke. Big fire. Mebbe cloud," Stub answered.

From the little rise they could just descry, far, far to the northwest, a tiny tip of bluish color, jutting into the horizon there. It did not move, it did not swell nor waver. No smoke, then; cloud—the upper edge of a cloud. The lieutenant and the

doctor had read it, and were riding on. In another minute it had sunk, swallowed by the land before.

"N' importe (does not matter)," murmured Baroney. "Perhaps more snow, my gracious! But who cares?"

In about two miles more, the lieutenant and the doctor halted again, on the top of a low hill that cut the way. They gazed, through the spy-glass, examining ahead. They did not leave the hill. They stayed—and the lieutenant waved his hat. He had seen something, for sure. Baroney and Stub were a quarter of a mile from him. The soldiers were a quarter of a mile farther.

"Come! He signals," rapped Baroney. Now he and Stub galloped, to find out. Behind, the soldiers' column quickened pace, for the orders of Sergeant Meek might be heard, as he shouted them.

The lieutenant and the doctor were gazing once more, with eyes and spy-glass both.

"What is it? The savages?" cried Baroney, as he and Stub raced in, up to the top of the flat hill.

Or the Spanish? The Spanish trail had been lost, for the past day or two. Maybe the Spanish were encamped, and waiting. The lieutenant answered.

"No. The mountains, my man! The mountains, at last!"

"Hurrah!" cheered the doctor. "See them?"

Baroney stared. Stub stared. It was the same bluish cloud, only larger and plainer. It jutted sharply—no, it sort of floated, but it did not move. It was fastened to the earth. And north from it there extended a long line of other clouds, lower, as far as one might see; while southward from it were still lower clouds, tapering off.

"One big mountain! A giant! Ma foi, how big!" Baroney gasped.

"All mountains. The Mexican mountains, on the edge of the United States," announced the lieutenant. "Take the glass. Look—you and Stub."

Look they did. The spy-glass worked wonders. It brought the clouds much closer, and broke them. They were no longer clouds— they changed to mountains indeed. In the spy-glass they shimmered whitely. That was snow! Or white rocks! They were medicine mountains. And the big mountain, so high, so mysterious, so proud: a chief mountain.

"You have been there?" asked the doctor, eagerly, of Stub. "With the Utahs?"

"No." And Stub shook his head. "Not there. No remember."

"Pshaw!" the doctor answered.

The column came panting up. The doctor and the lieutenant again waved their hats.

"The mountains, men! You see the Mexican mountains—the Great Stony Mountains. Three cheers, now, for the Mexican mountains!"

Everybody cheered three times: "Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!" Only the horses stood with heads drooping; they did not care.

"How far, would you think, cap'n?" Sergeant Meek queried.

"We ought to reach their base day after to-morrow."

"Hooray!"

But although they all marched ten more miles to-day, and more than eleven miles the next day, and more than twenty-three miles the next day, from camp on the third evening the big chief mountain and the lesser mountains seemed no nearer than before.

"Sure, they're marchin' faster'n we are," said John Sparks.

"Spirit mountains," Stub decided. "See 'em, no get 'em."

Another horse was about to die. There were fresh Indian signs, again. The Spanish trail had been found—it led onward, toward the mountains. The country was growing more bare, the air thinner and chillier. Through the spy-glass the mountains looked bare.

When the next herd of buffalo were seen, the lieutenant ordered camp made, and sent hunters out to kill meat enough for several days. There might be no buffalo, farther on. It was a poor country. He himself did not hunt. He went up on a hill and drew pictures of the mountains, on a piece of paper.

Stub did not hunt, either; he was almost out of arrows. He followed Lieutenant Pike to the hill, and watched him. But the pictures were only crooked lines, like Indian pictures.

The lieutenant glanced aside at him, and smiled. His smile was sweet, when he did smile.

"Would you like to climb that big blue mountain?" he asked.

Stub had to think, a moment. The big blue mountain! Yes, big and blue it was—and white; and very far. The thunder spirit might live there. Winter lived there. Could anybody climb it? It never was out of sight, now, except at night (and it never was out of sight, for days and days afterward), but it seemed hard to reach." *

"Top?"

"Yes, clear to the top," smiled the lieutenant.

Stub's eyes widened; and he smiled also.

"Sure. No afraid, with you."

* This was the celebrated Pike's Peak, of Colorado, later named for Lieutenant Pike, first white man to tell about it.

"Good!" the lieutenant praised. "We'll see."

The hunters killed seventeen buffalo, and wounded many more. When the best of the meat had been smoked, there were nine hundred pounds of it, and one hundred and thirty-six marrow-bones. The camp finished off the marrow-bones in one meal, as a feast before marching on to storm the big blue mountain.

VIII

BAD HEARTS IN THE WAY

"Des sauvages (Indians)!"

Thus Baroney shouted, pointing, from where he had checked his horse on the edge of a little rise overlooking a dip in the trail.

They all had been marching two more days, and had covered about forty more miles. This made seven days' travel, counting the two days of meat camp, and eighty-five miles, since the Big Blue Mountain had first been sighted. Now it and the lesser mountains were much plainer.

But here were the Indians, sure enough. The lieutenant had rather been expecting them. Yesterday the fresh tracks of the two men, again, had given warning. So the column were marching close together.

The Indians, on foot, were running toward the column, from some trees on the river bank, at the right.

"Close up, men," the lieutenant ordered.

"Close up, close up! Look to your priming!" ordered Sergeant Meek.

And the lieutenant and the doctor, with Baroney and Stub ready to interpret for them, led for the Indians.

"Pawnee, hein (hey)?" said Baroney.

"No Republic Pawnee; Grand Pawnee. War party; no horses," Stub explained. There was a difference between the Republic Pawnees and the Grand Pawnees.

"Others yonder, lieutenant!" exclaimed the doctor.

They looked. Another squad of the Indians were running down from a hill on the left. They carried flags on lances—the Grand Pawnee war colors.

"Make a surround!" guessed Baroney.

The lieutenant reined his horse, and drew his curved sword.

"Company, halt! Watch sharp, men!"

He glanced right and left, waiting to see if this was an attack. No—for, as the doctor suddenly said:

"Those first fellows act friendly, lieutenant. They have no arms; they're holding out empty hands."

"Forward!" ordered the lieutenant.

In a minute more they met the Indians from the timber. These Pawnees did indeed act friendly—and all too friendly! They crowded in among the

soldiers, shaking hands, putting their arms around the soldiers' necks, even trying to hug the lieutenant and the doctor and Baroney and the others who rode horseback.

The lieutenant got off, good-naturedly; instantly a Pawnee leaped into the saddle and rode the horse away. The doctor and Baroney lost their horses, also; Stub (who knew what the Pawnees were up to) was almost dragged down, but he stuck fast.

All was in confusion of laughter and jostling and pretended play.

"No, no!" the lieutenant objected, growing angry; and half drew a pistol. The men were getting together, wresting their guns from the Pawnees' hands and holding them high, to keep them free.

More Pawnees, from the timber, had joined, with guns and bows and lances; and the Pawnees from the hillside had come in. They included two chiefs.

The two chiefs issued orders, and the play stopped. The horses were returned. Then all went on to the trees by the river, for a talk.

Here matters again looked bad. The warriors frolicked, in spite of the chiefs. They were Grand Pawnees—sixty: a war party out to plunder the Padoucahs. But they had not found any Padoucahs;

so this seemed a good chance to plunder somebody else, instead of returning home empty-handed.

The lieutenant's face was red, as he angrily warded off the hands that clutched at his pistols and gun and horse's bridle.

"Stand firm, men!" he called. "Don't let loose of a thing—don't let them get behind us!"

"Kape your distance, you red rascals!" rasped Tom Dougherty, as they hustled him about.

"Steady! Steady!" Sergeant Meek cautioned.

"By thunder, they'd like to strip us," the doctor exclaimed.

Even Stub objected vigorously, in Pawnee. The Grand Pawnees were indeed rascals.

Guns were being cocked—click, click; several of the Pawnees, angry themselves, leveled bended bows. It was likely to be a fight between the sixteen Americans and the sixty Pawnees; and Stub sat alert, ready to pluck an arrow as quick as lightning.

"Guard those packs, men!" the lieutenant kept shouting.

But the two chiefs were working hard, shoving the warriors back, clearing a space. The head chief spoke to the lieutenant, and signed.

"He says: 'Let us talk,'" Baroney interpreted.

"Very well. Tell him we will talk or we will

fight," replied the lieutenant. "We won't be robbed. If it is peace, we will give him presents."

They all sat down in a ring, with the lieutenant and Baroney and the two chiefs in the center. The Americans sat under the American flag, the Pawnee warriors sat under the Grand Pawnee flags. The doctor, however, stood up, watching everything.

The Pawnee head chief took out a pipe and tobacco, for a peace smoke. That looked good. But before filling the pipe, the two chiefs made speeches.

"They ask what presents you will give them. They say they are poor," Baroney translated. And that was what they had said.

"Bring half a bale of tobacco, a dozen knives, and flints and steels enough for all, sergeant," the lieutenant ordered.

The head chief made another speech. He was refusing the presents. He asked for corn, powder and lead, blankets, kettles—all kinds of stuff.

"Tell him that there are our presents. We have nothing else for him," the lieutenant answered. "We are ready to smoke with him."

The chief did not lift the pipe. He and the other chief sat, with bad spirit showing in their eyes. The warriors commenced to hoot, and handle their guns and bows again.

"He will not smoke such poor presents," Baroney

reported. "I think they mean trouble. A little tobacco, lieutenant; maybe a little tobacco and powder."

"You had best look out, lieutenant," warned the doctor. "I don't like their looks."

"Tell the chief he will get nothing else. He can take those presents or leave them," bade the lieutenant, to Baroney.

Baroney hated to do it, but he had to obey. The head chief scowled. Then he signed, and an old man lugged in a kettle of water, as a return present.

Stub heard the Pawnee warriors talking scornfully.

"See what manner of men these white men are, with their rags and their poor gifts," they said. "They do not travel like the Spanish. They look like beggars."

But Stub well knew that although their horses were thin and sore, and they themselves were lean and tattered and almost barefoot, these Americans could fight.

Now Chief Pike and the two Pawnee chiefs drank from the kettle of water, out of their hands, and smoked the pipe, and ate a little dried buffalo meat. Several Indians were called upon by the chief, to pass the knives and flints and steels around. In-

dians who were given the presents threw them upon the ground.

The lieutenant shook hands with the chiefs, and rose.

"All ready, doctor," he called. "Pack your animals, sergeant, where necessary. We march."

The Pawnees sprang up, too, and crowded forward again.

"They make a surround," said Baroney.

"Look out, lieutenant! They're stealing your pistols—mine, too!" cried the doctor.

The lieutenant leaped upon his horse just in time to rescue his pistols, hanging from the saddle. He was hemmed in. The soldiers were swearing and darting back and forth, grabbing at thieves and protecting the baggage also.

Now the lieutenant had lost his hatchet. He exclaimed furiously.

"Tell the chief my hatchet is gone."

The chief only said:

"These are small matters for a great man."

He drew his buffalo robe high and turned his back.

The lieutenant flushed, more angry still, and stiffened in his saddle. He meant business. Stub had seen him look this way before.

"Leave the baggage and get your men to one

side, sergeant. Quick! Be ready with your guns. That's it. Baroney, tell the chief that the next warrior who touches our baggage or animals shall die instantly. Sergeant, at the first attempt, let the men shoot to kill."

The Pawnees understood. They saw the muskets half leveled, and the grim, determined faces behind. A warrior stretched out his hand, stealthily, to a pack—and John Spark's muzzle covered him in a flash. He jumped back.

"Go!" suddenly ordered the head chief. The Pawnees sullenly gathered their presents, and without another word filed away, the whole sixty.

"See if we've lost anything, sergeant,' said the lieutenant.

"One sword, one tomahawk, one axe, five canteens and some smaller stuff missing, sir," was the report.

The soldiers waited eagerly. They wished to follow and fight.

"No matter," gruffly answered the lieutenant. "We must save our lives for our work, my men. We have work to do. Forward, march." He shrugged his shoulders, and added, to the doctor: "I feel as badly as they do. This is the first time I ever swallowed an insult to the Government and the uniform.

But our number is too small to risk failure of our plans. Now for the mountains."

"By gar, once more my scalp was loose," said Baroney, to Stub.

"Yes. They had black hearts, those Grand Pawnee," Stub gravely agreed.

This day they marched seventeen miles, and the next day nineteen miles. In all they had come more than one hundred and twenty miles, their eyes upon the Big Blue Mountain, as the lieutenant called it. And at last they had just about overtaken it.

From camp, here where the river split into two large forks, one out of the west, the other out of the south, the Big Blue Mountain looked to be quite near, up a small north fork.

"Le Grand Mont," Baroney called it. "The Grand Peak." And the men called it that, too.

"Sure, it can't be more'n one day's march now," John Sparks declared, as from camp they eyed it again. "We can be there to-morrow at this time, with ease, in case those be the orders."

In the sunset the mountain loomed vast, its base blue, but its top pinkish white. After everything else was shrouded in dusk, its top still shone.

"How high, d' ye think?" queried soldier Freegift Stout.

"Thray miles higher'n we be; mebbe four," guessed Pat Smith.

"He's a grand wan all right," sighed Tom Dougherty. "Even a bur-rd wud nade an ixtra pair o' wings to get atop him, I'm thinkin'."

"No mortal man, or nothing else on two legs could do it, I reckon," said John Brown. "Unless that be the cap'n himself."

"American can," Stub reminded, proudly.

"You're right, boy," soldier Terry Miller approved. "Under orders an American would come pretty close to filling the job."

The lieutenant and the doctor had been gazing at the peak; it fascinated them, like it fascinated the men, and Stub. That night they talked together until late, planning for to-morrow. The lieutenant had decided to climb the mountain.

He sent for Sergeant Meek. The sergeant stood before him and saluted.

"I intend to take Doctor Robinson and two of the men, and this boy, to-morrow, and set out for the big mountain," the lieutenant said. "The camp will be left in your charge."

"Yes, sir," replied Sergeant Meek.

"These reports of the journey to date I also leave, with my personal baggage. The mountain is only a short day's march, but I have to consider that

we may be cut off or meet with other accident. To-morrow morning I will lay out a stockade, here, for the protection of your party. You are to wait here one week, with due caution against surprises by the savages and the Spanish. Admit nobody except your own command into the stockade. If we do not return or you do not hear from us within the seven days, you are to take my papers and such baggage as may be necessary, and march down river by the safest direct course for the nearest American settlement or military post, as may be. At the American frontier you will leave your men under instructions to report at St. Louis, and you will press ahead at best speed and deliver my papers to General Wilkinson, the head of the Army, wherever he may be. In event of your disability, you will entrust the papers to Corporal Jackson—acquainting him in advance with what is expected of him. In the meantime, here or on the march, keep your men alert and together, and do not forget that our Country depends upon our performing our duty without regard to our own interests."

"Yes, sir," replied the sergeant. He gulped—the ragged, weather-worn soldier. "Excuse me, sir—'tis only a day's march yonder, you say? You'll be coming back, sir?"

"If within human possibility, sergeant. But I

must climb that mountain to its highest point, in order to make certain of our position and ascertain the trend of the various streams. We are near the sources of the Arkansaw, as is evident. Our instructions are to find the heads of the Arkansaw and the Red River, on our way to the Comanches."

"Yes, sir," replied the sergeant.

"That is all. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir. I make bold to wish you good luck, sir. I wish I might be going with you, sir."

"Thank you, sergeant."

The lieutenant sat up late, writing. In his buffalo-robe, Stub dreamed of to-morrow, and the Grand Peak. He had understood only part of the lieutenant's long speech; but it was enough to understand that he was to be taken.

IX

A TRY AT THE "GRAND PEAK"

EARLY in the morning the lieutenant set the men at work cutting down fourteen trees, for stockade logs. A stockade was a fort. This fort was to be only a pen, open on the river and five feet high on the three other sides.

Soldiers John Brown and Terry Miller were the men chosen. That made a party of five. They all took only a blanket or robe apiece, and a little dried meat, besides their guns and Stub's bow and arrows. They started horseback at one o'clock, to cross the river and travel up the north fork, for the Grand Peak.

The men paused long enough to give three cheers, and wave their caps.

"Bon voyage (Good journey)," Baroney called.

"Good luck to yez."

"We'll be lookin' for you back."

"When ye get to the top, be lightin' us a bonfire, Terry."

The lieutenant raised his hat, in reply. The doctor waved, the two soldiers and Stub waved.

And the five splashed through the ice-cold water and left the eleven men under Sergeant Meek to build the fort.*

According to the doctor, this was the twenty-fourth day of the month named November. By the morning light the Grand Peak, glistening white, had looked to be nearer than ever. The lieutenant was certain that a half-day's march would bring them to its base; to-morrow they would climb it, and would be back in camp on the third day.

Mile after mile they hastened, their eyes scanning the distance before. The route up along the small fork was gravelly and bare, except for clumps of sage brush, and the willows bordering the stream. In places they had to cross deep washes cut by the rains. Not a living thing was sighted, save rabbits and prairie-dogs and a few antelope. And the Grand Peak and the line of lesser peaks—some white, some steel-gray, waited.

The sun sank low and lower, over their southern end. The Grand Peak grew bluer and colder, and the other mountains darkened.

The lieutenant and the doctor led. They always rode together. Stub and soldiers Miller and Brown followed close behind. After a while they all quit

* The fort was near present Pueblo, Colorado. Lieutenant Pike's squad marched up the west side of Fountain Creek.

the stream, to strike westward, on a trail more direct.

Soldier Miller scratched his head, on which the hair was long.

"It's a queer thing, John," he said. "There it is, that peak—and there it's been for more'n a hundred miles, with us a-making for it and never reaching it."

"We'll not reach it this day, that's sure, lad," answered John. "We've covered ten miles, and you'd think we'd been standin' still!"

In two miles more the sun had set. The shadows of the mountains seemed to extend out over the plain and turn it dark and cold. Stub pulled his robe closer around his neck. Now the Grand Peak had changed to deep purple—it had pulled its own robe up, for the night.

The lieutenant and the doctor suddenly veered aside, to a single low cedar, the only tree of the kind, around. There they halted and swung from their saddles.

"We'll make camp, men," the lieutenant ordered. "The base of the mountain evidently is farther than we had figured. But we'll reach it to-morrow morning, easily, and doubtless the top also, before night."

This was a cold camp—very cold with the breath from the mountains. They had dried buffalo-meat to chew on, but no water except that in the canteens,

and the lieutenant wished to save on water, for the climb.

He started them out again early, before sunrise. They headed for the Grand Peak. The horses were stiff, from the night, and thirsty, and moved slowly at first. Presently the sun rose. The Grand Peak flashed white in its beams, and assuredly was near. The foothills at its base were dark green: trees.

And there they stayed, the peak and the foothills, all day! Stub's eyes ached with gazing. Soldier Brown grumbled a little.

"It's a wild-goose chase. I've said that no man will ever climb yon peak. We'll wear out ourselves and our hosses for nothin'. Even if we ever reach the foot of it, look what's ahead of us."

"You may be sure the cap'n'll climb it, whether or no," retorted soldier Miller. "He's set out to do it, and do it he will."

"Oh, well; we're gettin' into a more likely country, anyhow," John granted. "The sign is better—that's one comfort."

This was true. They were entering among low hills, covered with cedars and pines. Up and down, up and down, and winding over and through, they hopefully pushed on—and from each rise they might see the long dark-green slope of the Grand Peak

more plainly. What a tremendous huge fellow he was, as he towered, shadow-flecked, into the floating clouds! The clouds veiled his top; he pierced them, and thus he sat gazing above the world.

"Gosh!" murmured John Brown. "He's a neck-cracker."

Toward evening the lieutenant and doctor, in advance and just crossing another of the many rolling hills, shouted back, and waved.

"Almost there, men!"

When the three others toiled up to the same place, they saw. A shallow valley lay before; at the farther edge the timbered slope of the Grand Peak commenced.

Hurrah!

Several buffalo were feeding, below. The lieutenant and the doctor made a dash for them—cleverly headed them off, shot rapidly, and downed two.

"Fresh hump for supper," cheered Terry. "I could eat a whole one, myself."

"Sure, I could drink a river dry, first," wheezed John. "Do you mind that we've struck no water since mornin'?"

"Water there," Stub hazarded, pointing at a line of lighter green near the foot of the mountain.

They arrived below in time to help butcher the buffalo while the lieutenant and the doctor rode on

looking for a good camping place. It was too late to do anything more this day.

A good camp spot was found on a little creek of ice cold water from several springs flowing out of the mountain's base.

"Here we are at last, lads," the lieutenant welcomed, as they brought the meat in. "We've wood, meat and water, and to-morrow we'll climb to the top. Success awaits us."

"It's been a long pull, eh?" laughed the doctor. "How about you, Stub? Are you game? I mean, are you ready to try?"

"I go," Stub announced.

"With the cap'n's permission we'll all go, sir," added soldier Miller. "'Twill be a view worth the seeing, up yonder above the clouds."

"No tellin' what we'll find, I reckon," put in John Brown.

"Whatever happens, we'll be content in the knowledge that we're losing no opportunity," the lieutenant declared. "When we stand up there, on what may prove to be the uttermost southwestern border of the United States, we will have extended the authority of the Flag into a region doubtless never before penetrated by man."

"And procured considerable geographic information," said the doctor.

"Yes, sir. The Government will be enabled to revise its atlases with accuracy, according to our new data as to the course of certain rivers, and the National boundary between the United States and the Mexican territory westward. And we may perceive a route that will take us directly from the Arkansaw to the head of the Red River and the Comanche country."

The long slope of the mountain rose dark and brooding right above them. They were so close in that from the campfire they could not see the top, but they felt the snow whitely waiting, up toward the black sky beyond the million stiffly marshalled, sighing pines.

Yes, cold it was, even here at the base; much colder than last night, out on the plain. In spite of the fire, their coverings were all too thin. At breakfast, before sun-up in the morning, the lieutenant's instrument by which he read the cold said nine degrees above freezing. In his moccasins, made from a piece of his buffalo-robe, Stub's feet tingled. Several days back John Sparks had given him an old pair of cotton trousers, cut off at the kneees, but these did not seem to amount to much, here. Still, Terry Miller and John Brown had nothing better, and their bare toes peeped through the holes in their shoes.

"We'll leave the camp as it is," the lieutenant briskly ordered. "We'll be back by night, so we'll not need our blankets or meat. See that the horses are well staked, Miller, where they'll be able to drink and forage during the day."

Doctor Robinson had gone outside for a minute. They heard his gun. He came in, packing a partly dressed deer.

"It's a new kind, lieutenant," he panted.

"Good. We'll hang up the hide, to inspect later."

The new kind of deer—a large deer with ears like mule ears—was quickly butchered. They hung its hide and the best of the meat upon a tree, until their return at evening.

"Forward march, to the top, men," the lieutenant bade. "Take only your guns and ammunition. Never mind the canteens. We'll find plenty of water, I'm sure. All ready, doctor?"

"All ready."

With the lieutenant in the lead and Stub bringing up the rear, they attacked the timbered slope. Puff, puff! Wheeze, wheeze! The pine needles underfoot and the frosty soil were slippery. Clouds veiled the sky, the timber depths were dark and cold, but presently they all were sweating. Gulches and draws cut the way, so that by sliding down in and clambering out, or else making circuits they lost much time.

The mountain fought them with cliffs and canyons, too, and sometimes they could scarcely make distance on hands and knees. Now and then they had to halt, to rest and catch breath.

Once or twice they jumped the new species of deer, from sudden coverts; there were many large birds, that rose with loud whirr. "Pheasants," the doctor and lieutenant called them. And twice, in the early morning, they saw buffalo feeding—a smaller buffalo than those upon the plains.

But they did not stop to hunt any of these.

About mid-morning they paused to rest again, and gaze behind from an open rocky knoll. The sun had burst forth.

"A fine day after all," panted the lieutenant.

"Yes, sir, up here. But look below. Ain't that a snowstorm, sir?" wheezed Terry Miller. The feet of him and of John Brown, where seen through their worn-out shoes, were bruised and bleeding. Stub's moccasins were shredded and soaked. The feet of the lieutenant and the doctor were in no better shape.

Now when they gazed backward and down, they looked upon a layer of dull cloud. With occasional break, the cloud rested over all the country at the mountain's base—and through the breaks might be seen the spume of falling snow!

"We've come some way, eh?" remarked the

doctor. "Thank fortune, we're above the storm. We ought to be near the top."

But peer as they might, they could not see the top. The timber and the rocks extended on and on and on.

"A pair o' stockin's would feel mighty good, on this kind of a trip," muttered John Brown. "'Tain't what you'd call a barefoot trail, in winter."

They rested a minute, the men leaning upon their muskets. Then——

"Come, boys," the lieutenant urged impatiently. "One more stint and we'll make it. Forget your feet. Think only of the top."

They climbed, breathing short and fast while they clambered and slipped. At noon they still had not reached the top; several times the top seemed at hand, but when they glimpsed it, shining white, it always was across another ridge, and higher.

Stub's ears rang, his heart drummed, his feet weighed like lead. The two soldiers staggered and stumbled. The snowstorm below appeared far. But the lieutenant and the doctor knew no quitting.

"We'll not reach it, this day," gasped John Brown. "'Tis the same old story. Marchin', and marchin', and never gettin' there."

"Anyhow, we'll reach it to-morrow," Terry replied.

The sun sank; the air grew very cold. Up here there was nothing moving but themselves; the deer and the pheasants and the squirrels had gone to bed. The pines were soughing mournfully in an evening breeze.

The lieutenant came to a stop before a reddish cliff which overhung and formed a shallow cave.

"We've done enough for one day," he panted. Even he looked tired out. "I think we'll gain the top shortly in the morning. We're into snow, and the trees are thinning; the top cannot be far. We'll take advantage of this cave, for the night. It's a shelter, at least."

"That's one piece of luck," the doctor laughed.

"We'll bunk together, so as to keep warm," announced the lieutenant. "We'll waive question of rank—we're all men, serving our Flag."

He made no mention of the fact that they were tired, hungry and thirsty after a long day's climb, and that they did not have blankets or food or water. He seemed to think that if he could stand it, they should stand it, too, for the sake of duty. That was his style—that was one reason the men loved him. He never asked them to do more than he did, and he never took his ease even when he might, as commander.

But this proved to be a miserable night. The

fire at the mouth of the cave smudged and smouldered. The rock bed was hard and cold. There was nothing to eat, nothing to drink, nothing to see; all around stretched the slope of the mountain, black and white and silent and lifeless—and cold, cold, cold.

Nobody slept much, as they all lay huddled close to each other for mutual warmth. They only dozed shiveringly, afraid to move for fear of losing what little warmth they were making.

It seemed to Stub that he had just dropped off, at last, when he was aroused.

The lieutenant was standing outside the cave. Daylight had come.

"Up, men," the lieutenant cried. "See this view! Oh, doctor! Be quick. It's glorious."

They piled out, with sundry grunts and groans over muscles stiffened by yesterday's work and by the hard bed. The lieutenant had spoken truly. The sky overhead was flushed rosily with sunrise—a clear day, here; but the storm still raged down below. The clouds there extended, level, in a thick layer of drab and white and pink, closing off the plains world from the mountain world.

"And yonder is the top, boys." The lieutenant pointed. "It's nearer than we thought. Let's try

for it now, and get back to camp and our supplies before dark."

He struck out and upward; in single file they followed, trudging through the brittle snow, and weaving among the pines. The final white ridge which their eyes had been marking during most of yesterday loomed large and plain above

The snow gradually deepened. Its surface bore not a trace of foot or paw or hoof. Soon it was to their knees, soon thigh high; but they were out from the trees and upon the bald space which formed the top.

Only a few more steps, now, through snow waist high, with rocks and gravel underfoot. Whew! Now for it! Hooray! The lieutenant was there first, to halt, and gaze about.

"Is that it, lieutenant?" puffed the doctor, anxiously.

Terry Miller huskily cheered, stumbled, but forged ahead.

The lieutenant stood, fixedly peering beyond.

"What!" uttered the doctor, arrived.

"It's the wrong peak, men," quietly said the lieutenant, his voice flat in the thin air. "Yes, the wrong peak."

The others floundered to him and the doctor, to gaze also. They all leaned heavily upon their guns.

Stub's legs trembled; he had nothing upon which to lean; but he stared, wide-eyed, his heart thumping.

It was the top. On the other side the mountain fell away, in a long, long snowy timbered slope, down into a deep, broad valley of dark pines; and at the farther edge of the valley there arose a mountain again—a snow-capped, much higher mountain: the Grand Peak itself! *

"And all our climb's for nothin', you say, sir?" wheezed John Brown. "We're not on the Grand Peak at all?"

"No. But our climb had not been for naught. We've done our best, as soldiers." The lieutenant's tone was dull and disappointed.

"I don't see how we made the mistake," the doctor proffered. "We thought that we were at the true base."

"We had no means of telling otherwise, doctor. This mountain looked to be a part of that other; but that other is separate, and twice as high. I judge it's fully fifteen miles distant, now."

"Shall we try for it, sir?" Terry Miller asked. "The day's young, sir."

The lieutenant shook his head decisively.

"Not this trip, Miller. 'Twould take a whole

* They had climbed Cheyenne Mountain, height 9,407 feet, south of Pike's Peak, which is 14,109 feet in height.

day to reach its base. You and Brown have no stockings, we none of us have proper clothing—no blankets, no provisions, and there's little prospect of game. We've come so far, and taxed our strength to the limit. Comparing the height of that mountain with this, I believe that no human being can climb the Grand Peak and survive. It is a region of eternal snow, barred to all vestige of life. We'll go back while we can. We have performed our duty, and we can see nothing from up here by reason of the cloud bank."

He looked at his thermometer.

"Four degrees below zero." Zero was the freezing-point.

He glanced sharply about.

"We must make haste. The storm is rising on us."

And even as he spoke the air turned raw and cloud wreaths began to float around them. So they back-tracked as fast as they could, and guided by a convenient ravine followed it down with such speed that they reached their camp at the base before dark, but in a snowstorm.

"Well," sighed John Brown. "The horses are safe, but the birds and beasts have eaten our deer and everything else."

The lieutenant shot a pheasant; of their meat

there was left only two deer-ribs; and they drank and ate.

"Rather limited rations, for five hungry persons after a two-days' fast," the doctor joked.

"We have our blankets, and we are safe, sir," the lieutenant answered. "Such a matter as diet should not enter into the calculations of men who explore the wilderness. They must expect only what they will get."

"The little cap'n's a man o' iron; he's not flesh and blood," Terry murmured, to John and Stub. "But I reckon he'd not refuse a bit more rib, himself."

"With him, when your belt's at the last hole, why, cut another," said John.

However, safe they were, although still very hungry. In the morning they rode down the creek, constantly getting lower and finding less snow. Just after noon the men shot two buffalo. That made a full feast—the first square meal in three days. So to-night they camped more comfortably under some shelving rock, outside the hills.

The place seemed to be a favorite camp ground for Indians, also. The valley was strewn with their horse sign, and with broken lodge-poles and old lodge-pins. The lieutenant thought that these had

been Ietan or Comanche camps, and was much interested.

The next afternoon they sighted the stockade; they were almost home.

"The flag's still flying. Thank God, the party's all right," exclaimed the lieutenant. "Give them a cheer, boys, when we arrive. We return disappointed, but not defeated, and far from conquered."

The hoarse cheer was answered. The soldiers—Sergeant Meek, Corporal Jerry Jackson, Freegift Stout, Alec Roy, and all—trooped out, to stand in line and present arms as the lieutenant, leading, rode through the gate. He saluted them like an officer again, and smiled wanly as if glad to be back.

X

ONWARD INTO WINTER

"So yez didn't climb the Grand Peak, after all," Tom Dougherty once more queried.

"We climbed far enough. As I told you before, nothin' on two legs or on twice two legs will ever climb that Grand Peak," John Brown answered. "Only an eagle can fly there. We were above the clouds, with naught to eat and little to breathe; and yon was the Grand Peak itself, as high again."

The men were wearied, but not yet wearied of hearing about the try for the Grand Peak.

"You're right. It's beyond the reach o' lungs and legs," said Sergeant Meek. "For the cap'n and the doctor measured it to-day with their instruments, from a good sight of it. Ten thousand, five hundred and eighty-one feet above ground they make it out to be, or a good two miles into the air. And allowing for the fact that we're nigh eight thousand feet up, right where we be, though you might not think it, that peak rises more'n eighteen thousand feet above sea level. The cap'n says it's close to being the highest mountain in the world." *

* The Lieutenant's measurement was wrong only about 1,000 feet. The height of the plain where they had been camping was some 4,500 feet, and Pike's Peak rises 9,600 feet above.

Corporal Jerry Jackson came in, from changing guard, and stood warming himself by the fire.

"By jiminy, those hosses are being eaten alive," he said. "I do pity 'em. I'd hate to be a hoss, on a trip like this."

"Yes; a man can understand an' grin an' bear it; but a hoss hasn't any sense o' the why an' wherefore."

"Those pesky magpies are still at 'em, are they?" asked the sergeant.

"A man to a hoss couldn't keep the things off with a club."

"They even try to take the meat out a fellow's hands," quoth Freegift Stout.

For the hungry magpies—bold birds of black-and-white, with long tails—hovered over the unsaddled and unpacked horses, lighted and pecked their raw backs until the blood flowed afresh. The horses, poor weak, thin creatures, kicked and whinneyed in vain. The magpies stuck fast and rode upon them, pecking. And as Freegift declared, swooped at the men also and grabbed for the meat in their hands.

"Have Roy and Gordon come in sight yet?" Sergeant Meek asked.

"We thought we could see 'em away out," replied Corporal Jerry.

"I don't wish 'em frozen feet. We've got enough of such in camp."

"Yes, and one pair too many, speaking for myself," groaned Jake Carter.

This was the fourth day since leaving the stockade, and a bitter cold day, albeit warmer, according to the lieutenant's instrument, than yesterday. The thermometer stood at only three degrees below. freezing; yesterday it had been at seventeen below.

The lieutenant had marched them out of the stockade, in a heavy snowstorm, on the morning after the return from the climb. The route was westward, again, up the south side of the Arkansaw. Just why he was so impatient to go on, snow or no snow, none of the men knew. Maybe he was in hopes of finding the Ietans or Comanches, yet; but Stub himself was quite certain that the Ietans wintered farther south. Or if he wished to discover the head of the Arkansaw and of the Red River, then the men wondered why he didn't build warm quarters, and lay in meat, and make fur clothing, so as to explore safely.

"Sure, sometimes I think that what he's aimin' at is to foller this here Spanish trail cl'ar into New Mexico, an' fetch up, with all of us, at Santy Fe, even as prisoners to them Spanish," John Sparks hazarded. "We can swear we made a mistake,

not knowin' the country; an' when we get back home again we'll have a nice lot o' news about them people an' the trail in, for the Government."

"That'll do," Sergeant Meek rebuked. "'Tis for him to lead and for us to follow; and he'll do the thinking."

They had marched fifteen miles, the first day, through the storm, with all on foot because the horses were getting unable to carry anything but the packs. In fact, for some days past it had been more comfortable to walk than to ride.

All that night it had snowed, and was still snowing in the morning. The men had slept under one blanket or robe apiece, in the snow. The little tent for the lieutenant and the doctor and Stub sagged with the weight.

"My gracious, but this is hard on the horses," Baroney said. "They paw and paw, to find one mouthful—and on their backs the ravens take many mouthfuls."

This day there was no marching. The men had all they could do to keep the fires going, and not freeze. John Sparks, who was a hunter, went out, but saw nothing. By evening the snow was a foot deep on the level—pretty tough for bare feet exposed in gaping shoes, and even for damp moccasins.

During the bitter night the sky cleared. It was to

be the seventeen-below morning. On the march one old buffalo bull was sighted, across the river. John Sparks and Hugh Menaugh mounted and went after him. They had to swim their horses through the ice-covered current, but they got the bull. Then, only two miles farther, everybody was ordered to cross, because a steep ridge barred the way.

In wading and breaking the ice, all were drenched waist high, and their wet clothing froze instantly. The lieutenant was wearing only thin cotton overalls, like most of the men, but he seemed not to feel the cold. He sent back help for John and Hugh, and set the other men at work building a fire. When John and Hugh arrived, with the meat, their feet had been frozen and they had to be lifted from their horses.

After they had been thawed out by snow and rubbing, and clothes had been partially dried, the march was continued, over a very rough, hilly country, up the north side of the swiftly flowing river. Then one of the pack-horses, driven crazy by the magpies and by hunger, ran off, back down the trail.

Jake Carter, Terry Miller and Pat Smith had pursued him on foot. By dusk, when camp was made at the end of thirteen miles, they were not in sight. The lieutenant grew worried.

"It's foolhardy for them to try to stay out all

night, with no food or blankets," he said; and the doctor nodded gravely.

"They're likely to perish, on that open prairie," he agreed. "But what's to be done? To search for them would be a fruitless risk, lieutenant."

The lieutenant sat up late, waiting for word from them. This morning they had appeared, Jake Carter with his feet, also, frozen. It had been a terrible night, for them. They had found the horse, but could not bring him in.

So the lieutenant had directed Alex Roy and William Gordon to ride and get the horse (which was almost frozen, itself, the other men had reported); and he and the doctor, with Stub and John Sparks, went out to scout. The lieutenant and the doctor measured the height of the Grand Peak, from a distance; they and John killed two buffalo-bulls, for moccasins for the camp, and took after a cow but didn't get it.

The gritty John Sparks stayed, to kill a cow if he might; the other three returned to camp with the bull hides.

Now the men, with numbed fingers, were busy making moccasins, around the fire, and not envying John the buffalo-hunter.

Alex Roy and Bill Gordon came in, with the

strayed horse in tow, but at dusk John had not appeared.

"He's still after his cow, and won't quit till he fetches meat. That's him! Well, he has a buffalo-robe and his flint and steel, so we'll see him in the morning."

They didn't worry about John. He was a good hunter and could take care of himself.

The lieutenant had decided not to wait for him, but to pick him up on the way. The next morning, which was the fifth morning, he broke camp at five o'clock, long before daylight; and sure enough, before they had marched far they found John. He rode in on them, with a load of cow meat. To-day they marched twenty miles, afoot and ahorse; killed two more buffalo and six wild turkeys; and what with the new moccasins and plenty of meat they thought themselves well fixed.

The country steadily grew rougher and the march led higher, but the soil was gravelly and the snow less than below. Pretty soon the Spanish trail was lost again. From camp everybody went out, searching for it, on both sides of the river.

"Come along wid us, lad," invited Tom Dougherty, of Stub; and afoot Stub ascended the south side of the river with Tom, and John Sparks, and John Mountjoy. It was a good squad. Tom was

scarcely more than a boy, himself: a young warrior of twenty years.

Presently they struck a broad horse-trail, pointing up-river.

"We'll see where it goes to," said John Sparks. They followed it as rapidly as they could. The river flowed down shallow and rippling and ice-bordered, among reddish, bare, rounded hills sprinkled with cedar and with snow patches. Far northward they saw, every now and then, the glistening Grand Peak. It was hard to lose this Grand Peak.

About noon they emerged from the long valley of the river into a broadening, with snow peaks shimmering in the distances, and a line of high flat-topped hills crossing the route before.

"Hist! There be Injuns or them Spanish, likely!" Tom warned, pointing ahead.

They halted and peered.

"No. I take it they're some of our own men," said John Mountjoy.

"What do ye say, Stub?" John Sparks queried.

Stub nodded. His eyes were true eyes.

"No Injuns. Our men," he asserted.

So they went on, toward the flat-topped hills, and met the parties of Sergeant Meek and Baroney.

"Hello to you," John Sparks greeted. "What luck?"

"There's no good your going much further up this side," answered Sergeant Meek. "The trail ends, and you'll get nowhere."

"Why?"

"You see where those flat-tops lie? The river comes out the mountains there, and comes a-whooping. We followed it up, till the valley got narrower and narrower; and right soon the river was nothing but a brook in width, boiling out something tremendous from betwixt cliffs half a mile high, leaving no space for man or beast. Nothing gets through there, except the water. We're thinking the trail must cross the river this side the gap, and turn off north'ard to round it." *

"Yes, it doesn't tackle that gap, anyhow," the men all declared.

"Suppose we might as well ford at a good spot, an' scout about a bit," proffered John Sparks.

So ford they all did, wading and splashing through, and slipping on the rounded stones of the bottom. The trail was found indeed, farther up, on the north side, where it left the river and bore northwestward through a dry valley or bottom, as if seeking a pass.

* They had met near where present Canyon City, Colorado, is located, on the Upper Arkansas River at the mouth of the famous Grand Canyon of the Arkansas. The gap between the cliffs was the Royal Gorge, in the Canyon.

"Now, whether to call this the trail o' the Spaniards, ag'in, or an Injun trail, I dunno," mused John Sparks, as they all grouped, examining.

"It's a hoss trail, plain enough," uttered Bill Gordon.

"'Tis hard to read, that's a fact," Sergeant Meek said. "But it leads somewheres, and like as not to the Red River that the cap'n's looking for, in Comanche country. Anyhow, we've done all we can, for to-day; and it's time we went back down and reported."

"Sure, he'll have no excuse for takin' us through betwixt them high cliffs," declared Alex Roy. "We'd be drowneded, hosses an' all. 'Tis a tough-lookin' hole, with no end in sight, an' the rocks covered with ice."

"Come on, boys," bade the sergeant, "or we'll be late for supper."

They turned and marched back, down river, to camp. This evening the lieutenant talked the report over with the doctor. They decided to proceed up the river, to the dry valley, and follow the trail.

The dry valley, below where the river gushed out of the break in the cliff barrier, was reached in one day's march. Camp was made in it at night-fall. This, according to the doctor, was the evening of the tenth day of December. The horses were watered

with melted snow, and given one pint of precious corn, each, brought this far from the Osage and the Republican Pawnee towns. For the camp there was plenty of deer meat, killed on the way, and one buffalo. It was to be the last big meal, through some days.

The Spanish trail had been weak, upon entering the valley. The lieutenant had rather feared that the sign was only that of a small scouting party. But farther in it had strengthened. Now at the camp it appeared to be a fairly well-trodden road, leading on northwest and probably over the next range of hills.

"The road to the Red River—hooray!" cheered Tom Dougherty. "Then down the Red River we'll go, out o' this cruel cowld, an' belike we'll be to Natchitoches an' the blessed war-rmth o' Louisiany long before spring."

XI

SEEKING THE LOST RIVER

"It's no use to march farther on this line, doctor."

Doctor Robinson answered promptly.

"I think you're right, lieutenant. We're getting nowhere, only deeper into the mountains. Men and horses are about at the end of their strength. There seems to be nothing ahead, except more cold, hunger and blind scrambling."

"The men are brave fellows," said the lieutenant. "That human beings, half fed and near naked, should be called upon to endure such marches and camps, amidst snow and zero weather, is almost more than can be expected from even soldiers. Their pay is a pittance, they don't know where they're going, they were not prepared for winter, yet I've heard not a word of complaint. When we return to the United States, the Government surely will reward them."

The lieutenant and the doctor, with Stub, were standing upon a high ridge some distance from camp. A week had passed since they all had entered the dry valley, to follow the trail north from the

Arkansaw, on the search for the head of the Red River.

But instead of rounding the gap in the cliffs, the trail had led away, and away, ever northward, into the midst of the snow-caps. Presently, or after a couple of days, it had come out at the bank of another river, frozen over, forty paces wide, and flowing, as the lieutenant discovered, *northeast!*

That was a disappointment and a surprise. He and the doctor plainly were puzzled. The river was wrong. To be the Red River it should have flowed southeast. The lieutenant decided that this river must be the Platte River—or the beginnings of it, for the great Platte River was known to flow mainly through the plains, far north of the Pawnee country, and hundreds of miles distant.

The snowy mountains had closed around. They rose high and white and coldly silent. There appeared to be no way out, except by the back trail to the Arkansaw again, or by following this new river down-stream, but where? *

The trail was continuing, up along this frozen river that wound through a series of snowy valleys

* If this stream was the South Platte River, as the Lieutenant thought, then they had entered into the western part of Central Colorado's great South Park; very far indeed from any Red River.

between steep wooded hills. They all marched upon it. It evidently was going somewhere, perhaps to a better country, perhaps still to the head of the Red River and the circuit south for the lower regions of New Mexico. At least, the Spanish had some goal in view.

Next, they had come to a large camp, the largest yet, and only a few weeks old. But it had been an Indian camp. There were the circles where lodges —many lodges—had stood, the ashes in the center of each, and sign of fully one thousand horses.

"Utah," declared Baroney, examining a cast-off moccasin.

Stub agreed. Moccasins differed, and these were Utah moccasins, by the cut.

"Sure, then we're not follerin' the Spanish, or even the Comanches," John Sparks groaned, doubled over with rheumatism. The men all were pretty badly crippled by frost and chilblains and rheumatism, and their belts were small around their stomachs. "Weren't ye ever in this country before, boy? The Utahs had ye, once, you say."

Stub did not know.

"No remember. Big country, John. Mebbe here, mebbe somewhere."

The lieutenant and the doctor had asked him the same question; but he was as puzzled as they. He

might have been hereabouts in summer; it was very different in winter. His head hurt, too. So he could not help them.

From the old camp, which seemed to have been a hunting camp, a regular village, and extended six miles long and two miles wide, covering the valley bottom, a trail led out, up stream again. In killing two buffalo (the first fresh meat since leaving the Arkansaw) another gun had burst—the third in the march. Its muzzle had got stopped with snow, and its barrel was very brittle from the frost.

John Sparks cut the burst end off, so that the gun might be used. Hugh Menaugh had no gun at all, and was marching with the lieutenant's sword and pistols.

The trail westward was not made by the Spanish. The Spanish trail (if there had been any Spanish trail) was swallowed up, in the big camp. But the trail out was better than none at all. It led through still more old camping places, where there were empty corn-cribs. There were no old corn-fields, though, and this set the men to wondering whether these Indians might not have got corn from the Spaniards, after all.

Then, on a sudden, the trail quit. It left them stranded, amidst the mountains. That had occurred this morning. The lieutenant had sent out searching

parties. He then had taken the doctor and Stub, and climbed to the top of the high ridge, to spy out the country lying around.

"The men should be rewarded the same as the Lewis and Clark men will be rewarded—with money and land," now the doctor said.

"A more heroic little band never wore the United States uniform," the lieutenant declared.

The doctor laughed.

"They're not wearing that, these days, lieutenant. No one would take you and them for soldiers."

Very true. About the last trace of the blue uniforms had vanished. Only the lieutenant still had blue trousers, of thin cloth, for wearing on the march. His chief's uniform, of bright shoulder-pieces and shining buttons, he kept in a trunk, until he should meet the Spaniards or the Comanches. From his red-lined cloak he had cut a cap, and sewed fox-skin to it, for the inside; the rest of the cloak had gone into socks and mittens, for himself and Stub. On his feet were buffalo-hide moccasins, on his body a capote or blanket-coat; and up to his knees his legs were wrapped in deer-hide. He looked like a chief, nevertheless.

All this was little enough, for day and night wear in cold and storm. The doctor had less. To be sure, he had made himself a fur cap, of rabbit-

skin, and a deer-hide coat and mittens—but buckskin, without much under it, is cold stuff, as everybody knows. His trousers were torn so that they showed his own skin. His feet were clad in socks cut from a piece of blanket, and in the hide moccasins which did not fit and had to be tied on with thongs.

The men, and Stub, had been put to all kinds of shifts. Some wore coats cut, like the doctor's socks, from the gray, threadbare army blankets—and socks to match. Some wore coats of leather—poorly tanned hides that they had saved. Some wore even leather trousers like leggins. All wore buffalo hide moccasins, but not a one had a hat or cap. Their long hair protected their heads, and their faces were covered with shaggy, bristling beards—except Tom Dougherty, whose beard was only a stubble in patches. The other men poked a great deal of fun at young Tom.

As for Stub, his beautiful robe had long ago been turned into moccasins and leggins; and he tried to be comfortable in these, and a shirt from a left-over piece of John Sparks' gray blanket, and socks and mittens from the lieutenant's red-lined cloak. He did not need a cap.

Of course, the blankets and hides that had been used were needed for coverings, at night; but in such cold weather it was almost impossible to strip

other hides and dress them. They were like boards, especially the buffalo hides. And deer were scarce.

From the high ridge where he and the lieutenant and the doctor stood the view was wide and wonderful, although not cheering. Mountains, mountains, mountains, their sides and tips shining white with snow, their bases, where seen, dark with wooded hills, the pine branches heavily laden by winter.

Far in the east and the southeast the mountains seemed to form a line with every gap stopped.

"Isn't that our Grand Peak, away yonder?" asked the doctor, pointing. "If so, I judge it's a hundred miles, as the bird flies."

"And unreachable from here, except by a bird, sir. We're shut off from it, completely. Besides, our road does not lie in that direction. Our duty as explorers demand that we do not give up so easily." And the lieutenant turned his glasses, so as to sweep the north and the northwest.

On the north were lofty hills, pine covered, breaking the nearer view; and snow mountains grouped behind them. The frozen river, marked by willows, stretched onward, in crooked bed, through the valley, now broad, now narrowed, into the northwest, soon to be closed upon by the hills and mountains there.

In all the great expanse nothing moved; even the

other exploring parties were out of sight. It was a dead country.

The lieutenant shrugged his shoulders.

"Not very promising, eh?" the doctor queried anxiously.

"It does not promise success. Our course up this river should be abandoned. We are constantly making farther and farther northward, separated from the Red River by the mountains; game is getting less, the trail is unreliable, and we shall depend upon it no longer."

He gazed southward. The hills rose to mountains here also. He used his spy-glass intently. He handed it to the doctor.

"You'll see a great white mountain range, appearing through a gap almost directly south."

"Yes, sir. A thundering way off."

"It seems to be the end of a long chain extending westward from it. That chain, I believe, is the divide draining on this side into the Platte, on the other side into the Red River. We're on the wrong side. We should march southwest, to cross the nearer portion of the chain, and eventually come out upon the head of the Red River. At all events, we'll try it, while we can. But our march through here has not been wasted, for our Country. We can lay down on our map the sources of the Platte, which no

one has supposed to be located at such a distance from the plains."

They all took another look, scanning the region south and southwest. With his own eyes Stub might descry the landmark of the Great White Mountains. The air was very clear, the sun rested just right, and through the gap there the tops of the mountains, sharp cut and triangular, stood out plainly amidst the other, lesser peaks. That called for a long, long journey.

They went back to camp. The other parties came in, and reported nothing but an old Indian camp, farther up. They had seen no game.

"An' what nixt, then, I wonder?" Pat Smith remarked, at the fire. "Do we kape goin', wid no end. Sure, the Red River can't lay hereabouts. We'll be nearer comin' to Canady."

"No keep going," Stub proudly announced. "The cap'n say turn 'round, for south. Big ridge there; big white mountains; Red River other side."

"South'ard? Hooray! That's a good word. It puts heart into us; hey, lads? We'll be gettin' out o' this trap where even the Injuns don't dare bide in winter, an' we'll be findin' the Red River, after all."

Stub's news cheered the men greatly. It took only a little to encourage them.

XII

IS IT FOUND AT LAST?

"The Red River, men! Three cheers! We think we've found it at last!"

It was the evening of the second day's march into the southwest. The doctor and the lieutenant had gone out from camp, to survey about, as usual. The first line of mountains had been crossed and already every eye was eager and every heart was keen for the traces of the shifty Red River.

Matters looked promising, too. Noon camp to-day had been made at a little spring, the unfrozen waters of which flowed trickling and formed a small stream wending southeast for the bottom of the valley.

"The beginnings of the Red River—do you reckon it might be the beginnings of the Red River, cap'n?" the men queried.

But the lieutenant smiled and shook his head.

"I wouldn't dare say so, lads, and disappoint you. We may be a long way yet from the real Red River."

Still, some of the men did not believe him, until

they had left the valley and the spring behind, and in a narrow pass of the next ridge had come upon another spring and another stream, larger. Among so many springs and streams, who might tell which was the source of the Red River?

They followed the stream part way through the pass, and encamped there in a snowstorm. The snow, sifting thickly, shut off the view before; it was glum weather for a hungry camp; the men crouched close, snow-covered, around the fire, or moved hobbling, at their various jobs; the gaunt, sore-backed horses cropped desperately, pawing into the snow, or hunched, coughing and groaning, in the scant shelter of the low cedars and spruces.

The horses of the lieutenant and the doctor, and Stub's yellow pony, had been turned into pack animals, to lessen the loads of the other animals. Everybody was marching on foot.

"Did you say that the cap'n an' the doctor thought likely we'd have to go cl'ar back south'ard, fur as the Great White Mountains yonder, so's to strike the river?" John Sparks asked, of Stub.

"Mebbe there, mebbe sooner," Stub nodded.

"If we ketch 'em, I hope he won't be axin' us to climb 'em," spoke John Brown.

"Got to ketch 'em, first," laughed somebody.

"We might as well be chasing a mountain as a river," said Terry Miller.

"Oui," agreed Baroney. "Ma foi, the mountains are there, in sight; but the river—it's nowhere."

"Never mind, never mind, lads," Sergeant Meek put in. "Not a man of us works as hard as him and the doctor; they're always breaking the trail, and they're always out whilst we're resting a bit. Look at 'em now, scouting in the snow without a bite to eat. Sure, we ought to be proud to keep a stiff upper lip and follow 'em as fur as they'll go, whether that's to Canady or Mexico or the Pacific Ocean. Ain't we soldiers?"

"We'll follow. You bet we will," the men chorused. "There's no harm meant in our talk, but we got to talk about somethin' besides our feet an' our bellies."

Now here came the lieutenant and the doctor—trudging fast, panting, snowy, their beards plastered white, but their thin faces lighted with smiles. The doctor gleefully flourished his fur cap, and hailed them.

"The Red River, men! Three cheers! We think we've found it at last!"

"Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!" The steep sides of the narrow pass echoed, and the miserable horses half pricked their ears, dumbly questioning.

The two came directly to the fire. They were out of breath. The circle respectfully opened for them.

"Did we hear right? Is it true, then, sir? Ye found the Red River?" eagerly inquired Sergeant Meek, of the lieutenant.

"Yes, sergeant." And the lieutenant beat his red cap and stamped, to dislodge some of his snow. "That is, the signs are the most hopeful for many a day, and we all have good reason to be inspired of success. Listen, men. The facts are these: Doctor Robinson and I advanced about four miles, out of this defile and into a prairie that lies beyond. There we discovered a fine stream, with all the characteristics of a river. It is some twenty-five yards wide, very swift, in a clearly marked rocky channel, and the general direction of its flow is southeast."

"Hooray!"

"The creek we are now encamped beside evidently joins it. This is all I have to say at present. To-morrow, or as soon as marching conditions warrant, we will proceed, examine the ground more thoroughly, and demonstrate whether or not we may consider ourselves actually at the source of the Red River."

"News like that takes the chill off the air,"

laughed Freegift Stout, when the lieutenant and the doctor had gone into their tent, for a rubdown.

"B'gorry, we been tellin' 'em that the Red River was surely hereabouts," asserted Tom Dougherty. "Wan spring, an' then another, an' then a crick, an' then the river itself—an' nixt, out o' the mountains we'll be an' wid iv'ry mile gettin' closer to war-rmth an' people."

"What do you want o' people?" Corporal Jerry demanded. "They may be the Spanish, or the Pawnees again, or worse."

"Come wan, come all," Tom retorted. "Sure, I wouldn't object to a bit of a fight, for a change, man to man. But fightin' these mountains is up-hill work." And he laughed at his joke.

"Well, I hope with all my heart the cap'n's struck the right trail," said Sergeant Meek. "And he's pretty certain, or he wouldn't have said so much. He's no man to make a brag, as you know. For the first time since we entered the mountains he's looking sort o' content. He deserves a turn o' luck. 'Tis always of his country he's thinking, and of us, and never of himself; and though in matter of muscle he's the smallest man amongst us, he picks the hardest jobs."

In the morning the snow was falling faster than ever. They all were anxious to reach the river, but

the pass was so clogged with drifts and their horses were so weak that the march took them only out to the edge of the bottom-land.

It was the fifth day without sight of game. The lieutenant ordered a hunt, before dark; but not even a rabbit was found. There was nothing but snow, snow, snow.

"My belt's twice around me already, an' is startin' on the third lap," declared Alex Roy.

However, the horses were in luck, at last—and they needed it. John Sparks and Tom Dougherty reported a fine big patch of long grass down near the river. In the morning the lieutenant sent Baroney and Stub, with the wretched animals, to set them to grazing and herd them—and a long cold task this proved to be.

Still, as Baroney said, as he and Stub trudged about or squatted with their backs to the squalls:

"If we cannot eat, ourselves, it is a great pleasure to watch the horses eat; hein?"

Late in the afternoon Corporal Jerry Jackson came down.

"You're to fetch the horses in with you, at dusk," he said. "Never a trace of game, all day, so we'll pull out in the mornin'."

"Down the Red River, mebbe, Jerry?" Stub asked.

"I dunno, but somewhere. The cap'n knows—an' he knows we're on short rations of only a few mouthfuls to a man."

The doctor and Baroney were to start out early, down river, hunting. The lieutenant and two or three men were to explore up stream and see where the river began, if they could. The rest of the men were to march down river with the baggage, until they killed enough game so that they might camp and wait.

"Miller and Mountjoy, 'tis you with the cap'n," ordered Sergeant Meek.

"I go, too, Bill?" pleaded Stub.

"Sure, that's for him to say. I've only my orders, lad," Sergeant Bill answered.

So Stub appealed to Lieutenant Pike himself.

"I go with you, please?"

But the lieutenant gravely shook his head.

"Not this time, my boy. You'd best go down river with the others, where there's more chance of finding game. Up stream it's a rough country, and the three of us are likely to be hard put for meat. We'll only explore for a day or two; you stay with the party."

As anybody might have foretold, the lieutenant again had taken the heaviest work.

"I go with the doctor, then, please," Stub proposed. "Down river."

"He and Baroney will be hunting. You have no weapon. But you can do your duty like a soldier by tending the horses."

Stub mournfully thought upon his bow, broken several days ago. Hugh Menaugh spoke up, saluting.

"Beggin' your pardon, cap'n—he's a plucky lad an' if you say for him to go wid the doctor he can have one o' the pistols you loaned to me. Belike he'll fare as well wid the doctor as wid us, an' mebbe bring him luck. An' we've all been boys, ourselves, oneasy for doin' things."

"You've a kind heart, my man," answered the lieutenant, smiling. "If the doctor is agreeable to having his company, all right. You may settle it between you."

Settled it was, right speedily, for Doctor Robinson had a kind heart, too.

"Here's your pistol, then," Hugh bade. "Wid wan load. Be sure ye get a buff'lo, now."

Stub nodded, and carefully stowed the long dragoon pistol in under his belt. The curved handle crossed his stomach.

"I see him, I get him, Hugh."

He and the doctor and Baroney set out, first.

"Down river; we'll meet you down the Red

River, Baroney, old hoss," called the men. "Here's wishin' you fat meat, doctor, sir—an' the same for the rest of us."

"I'll follow the main trail in two days and catch up," the lieutenant had promised. "But nobody is to wait for me until meat has been secured. Do your best, doctor. There are rations for only forty-eight hours."

It was another lean day. Although the three did do their best, scouting in advance from the river to the hills, and exploring the side draws, oftentimes waist deep in the snow, they stirred never a hoof nor paw, and rarely a feather. That was discouraging.

Now and again they saw the main party, who had crossed the river and were toiling along, down the other flank of its winding course.

"Not a thing sighted by us, and not a gunshot heard from those other fellows," the doctor sighed, at evening. "Well, we'd better go over and join them, for camp, and try again in the morning."

They made for the fire that was twinkling, below and beyond; crossed the river upon the ice, and arrived.

"Any luck, sir?" queried Sergeant Meek, of the doctor.

"None to-day sergeant; but we have hopes for to-morrow."

"Yes, sir. The same here, sir."

"So ye didn't fetch in a buffler with that big pistol?" John Sparks bantered, of Stub.

"To-morrow," answered weary Stub.

"To-morrow is a grand time," said Baroney. "If there wasn't any to-morrow, I don't know what we'd do."

The supper to-night was a scant meal, for all: just a few mouthfuls of dried meat and a handful of parched corn. In the morning the doctor decided briskly.

"You've rations for only to-day, sergeant?"

"Yes, sir; and scarce that, but we can make 'em do."

"I feel sure that Baroney and the boy and I will find game before night. If we do, we'll come in with it. But you keep on, as Lieutenant Pike ordered, until you kill meat or until he joins you, and never mind our whereabouts. We'll take care of ourselves somehow, and I don't propose to come in unless loaded."

"You'll likely stay out, in the hills, sir, you mean?"

"That depends on the day's luck," smiled the doctor. "But even if we do, we'll be no worse off than Lieutenant Pike and Miller and Mountjoy. We're all rationed the same, and there's little to

choose between camping together and camping separately."

But even Stub felt the seriousness of it when again he followed the doctor and Baroney, for the second day's hunt. If nothing was killed to-day, then to-morrow they would begin to starve; pretty soon they would be eating the horses, and next their moccasins, and without horses and moccasins they would die before getting out of the monutains.

XIII

MEAT FOR THE CAMP

BUFFALO!

Stub stared hard. He scarcely could believe his bleared, aching eyes. Was it really true? Buffalo? Now what to do?

This was early in the third morning after leaving the main camp. For two days he and the doctor and Baroney had been hunting, hunting, from dawn to dark; ranging up and down, among the hills and draws, and wading the snow, on only one small meal. In fact, they practically had had nothing at all to eat, in forty-eight hours. Through the two nights they had tended fire and shiveringly dozed, without blankets, in the best spot they might find, where they could secure a little protection from the biting wind.

How they were going to keep on living if they discovered nothing to eat, this day, he did not know; Baroney did not know; the doctor hadn't said. But they had told the sergeant not to expect them unless with good news; the other men probably were famishing, too, and they themselves might as well starve in one place as another.

Full of aches and pains (and that was all!) they had passed a bad night, so that this morning they really had been glad to stagger up and out again, into the bleak whity-gray, even though they might be starting upon only another long day of fruitless tramping.

Baroney groaned.

"Ma foi! My legs move, my head thinks, but there is nothing between. I have no stomach."

"We'll find meat to-day. Not only for ourselves but for the boys in camp, remember," encouraged the doctor. "They're likely depending on us, for we've heard no gunshots. We must separate and hunt widely."

They had trudged forth, before sun-up. They had crossed the first wooded ridge, to the next little valley.

"Stub, you follow up, along the high ground on this side," the doctor ordered. "Baroney will take the middle. I'll take the farther side. Move slowly and all together, and we'll surely start something. Head off anything that comes your way, Stub, and drive it down to us. Don't waste the load in your pistol."

"Yes, I will drive," answered Stub, patiently.

He waited, shivering, until Baroney had halted in the bottom, and the doctor had toiled clear across

to the other slope, and up. Then they three moved on together—one searching either flank, the third in between.

The valley was not wide. Its bottom was level and open except for the snow-covered brush; its sides were dotted with cedars and pines. Keeping near the top of his side, so as to drive anything down hill, Stub hunted faithfully, hoping, too, that he would hear the doctor or Baroney shoot. His eyes scanned every foot before and to right and left, seeking tracks. Even a rabbit would be welcomed—yet he didn't wish to spend his bullet on a rabbit.

He saw nothing to make him draw his pistol. It weighed heavily and rasped his stomach and thigh as he plodded on.

The sun was about to rise above the snowy ridges on the east. They had been hunting for an hour, at least, and had heard never a sound. Then he reached a place where his slope broke sharply into a side valley. A fellow always expected something, at such places. So he stole forward cautiously; he came to a ledge of rock, and peered down. What he saw instantly almost stopped his heart-beating, and dazed his eyes with sudden excitement.

Buffalo! Really? Yes, yes—buffalo! He was not dreaming.

It was more of a basin than a valley, in there:

broadening to a snug cup protected by rim-rock, just back of the opening into the main valley, and thence tapering and climbing until it pinched out, on the ridge. A few leafless aspens (sign of water) and sprawly evergreens grew in the cup, and there was marsh grass, in weedy clumps. And the buffalo.

Two—three, lying down and comfortable, like cattle, their legs under them. The snow was well trodden; they had been in here some time.

Now what to do? He trembled, and thought his best. If he only might take the time to signal Baroney and the doctor. But even as he peered the sun flashed up, and the first beams streamed into the cup. One large bull suddenly stirred, and all at once was on his feet, swaying his shaggy head and sniffing the air. Was it the sun, or did the breeze tell him something? He may have scented the doctor, or Baroney, or Stub, or he might merely be thinking of breakfast and the day's program.

There! The second buffalo was out of bed, and imitating the first. The third seemed to be getting uneasy. Stub dared not delay, to signal. His eyes roved rapidly. He was too far, for pistol shooting. The buffalo might only start to graze—they might start to travel, warned by danger smell—and they were as likely to go one way as another. He must

get down in behind them and drive them out where the doctor and Baroney would see them.

He drew back, and crouching scurried on a half circuit, to slip into the basin, above them. He struck a little ravine, leading down. All his practice at scouting with the Pawnee boys stood him in good stead, now. He moved fast but silently, darting from spot to spot, stepping with care and listening for alarm sounds; and stealing more gently as he arrived at the bottom, where the ravine ended in a cedar and a shoulder of rock.

The upper edge of the basin was just around that corner. He planned to step out, into sight. The buffalo would run in the other direction, and the doctor or Baroney might be able to head them, and kill one at least; then follow and maybe kill more.

But first he drew his big pistol, on the slim chance of a sure shot, himself. Gradually he thrust his head beyond the cedar and the rock shoulder—and jerked back in a jiffy. A fourth buffalo was standing there almost within touch!

Stub's heart beat furiously, and he sank trembling, to think. He must look again; and he did, as gradually as a timid prairie-dog emerging from its burrow.

Wah! It was a cow, turned broadside to him, half dozing as she bathed in the sunshine.

Now he must steady down, and slide out a little farther, for a sure shot. He huddled back, once more to take breath. He examined his flint, and opened the pan, to stir the caked powder of the priming. Then with both hands he cocked the heavy hammer—click-click! The noise frightened him, and he hoped that it had not frightened the cow. Then he extended the pistol in front of him, and began to follow it by worming on, inch by inch, around the low-branching cedar.

Hoorah! The cow was still there, but she had heard or smelled. Maybe she had heard the click-click. She had not moved; only, her head was up, and she was gazing with her head turned in the direction of the other buffalo.

He'd better shoot as quickly as possible. Another inch, and another, he squirmed, for right position. Now! She was about fifteen paces—not so near as he had thought, but this was the best that he might do with any safety. So he leveled the long-barreled dragoon pistol, again with both hands; held breath until the muzzle seemed to be pointing directly in line with a spot just behind her fore shoulder—and while it slightly wavered there, he pressed the trigger.

Bang! The pistol well-nigh jumped from his hands; a cloud of smoke had belched—and dimly

seen through the smoke, by his watering eyes, the cow had given a great leap and had vanished.

She had run the other way, down the basin. Up Stub leaped, and ran, too. The basin seemed to be still echoing with the report, but he heard the thud and clatter of hoofs, also, and a fear that he had missed her made his heart sick.

He panted into full sight of the little basin just in time to see a half score—no, a dozen or more of the burly animals pelting through for the other end, to gain the open of the main valley. He'd had no idea that so many were in here. They'd been hidden from him, the most of them—lying in cosy beds where he'd not happened to look.

Away they went, jostling and stringing out, bolting blindly. One, the last in the flight, loped painfully—fell farther and farther behind. It was his cow! He had hit her, and hit her hard. Hoorah! He darted for the spot where she had stood. He trailed her for a few steps, and the trampled snow was blotched red. Blood! Hoorah! He ran on, down through the basin, to see her again. Now Baroney or the doctor might get her, because she would grow weak.

He wondered if they had heard him shoot. The basin was empty, all the buffalo had charged on into the valley—that was what he had wished them to do,

and maybe he had killed one and signaled, besides. He hoped that the doctor would not be angry. Now if the buffalo only turned down toward Baroney——!

Hark! Another shot! Somebody out there had fired—Whang! He ran faster—to the mouth of the basin—into sight of the main valley—and again, hoorah!

The fleeing buffalo had blundered against Baroney. He had been not far outside; he had shot one—it was down, in the snow; not the cow, either, for the cow was down, too—there were the two black spots, motionless, and the little herd were streaming across the valley, for the other slope, with Baroney lumbering after—and yonder, on the slope, the doctor was plunging toward the bottom, to get in a shot also.

Could he do it? Yes! He ran quartering, stumbling and lunging; the leading buffalo sensed him, swerved, they all swerved; he knelt and aimed and fired, quickly—around wheeled the buffalo, again alarmed, and came pelting back for Stub's side, as if to escape through their basin—but one lagged, wavered, halted, and suddenly collapsed. That made three!

The remainder of the herd were coming straight for Stub. He had no load for his pistol; he could

only dance and wave his arms and yell, to stop them. This he did. Once more they tacked; Baroney had lain flat, hoping; foolish things, they tacked almost for him—wait—wait—aha! His gun puffed smoke, the report echoed dully, a buffalo had jumped high and stiff-legged and Baroney was after him, loading on the run. Down pitched the buffalo. That made four!

The doctor was running again, but the rest of the buffalo got away, up the valley. All right; they had left plenty of meat. Hoorah!

Stub hastened forward, wild with joy. The doctor was coming. They met Baroney, where two carcasses—a bull and Stub's cow—were lying close together.

"Hurrah!" cheered the doctor.

Baroney capered—"Hoozah! Hoozah!"

"Four! One to me, two to you—that's good. And what about this other? Who killed *her?*"

"The boy. Oui! I think he killed her, with that pistol," Baroney jabbered. "I hear one shot—bang! I do not know where. Then the buffalo come running out. And before I can shoot, I see this cow tumble down, and die. She has a hole in her—a bullet hole."

"Did you shoot her, Stub? With your pistol?"

Stub nodded.

"First I see three. Down on bottom. They act scared. I go to drive them out. She very close. I shoot her. She run, all run, I run. Then I hear shooting. Baroney get one, you get one, Baroney get 'nother. Now lots of meat. Hoorah!"

"The meat! The meat!" cried Baroney, as if reminded of great hunger. Down he plumped, digging furiously with his knife and tearing with his fingers. He wrested out a strip of bloody flesh and began to chew it and suck it.

Stub, seeing red, likewise fell to. All of a sudden he could not wait longer.

"Here, doctor" And Baroney, his beard stained wolfish, passed him a piece.

But the doctor straightened up.

"That's enough. I must carry the news to the men. You two stay here and butcher what you can till horses come from the camp. It may be a matter of life or death for those other fellows. We ought to get this meat to them without delay."

And he was away, walking fast and running down through the valley, for the river beyond and the main party somewhere along it.

"He's one fine man," gasped Baroney, gazing after. "We think only of our stomach, he thinks of those others."

They worked hard, cutting and hacking and haul-

ing before the carcasses got cold and the hides stiff. With Baroney's hatchet they cracked a marrow-bone apiece, so as to scoop out the fatty pith.

Presently the sun was high and warming. Two men were coming afoot up the valley. They brought no horses——

"Miller and Mountjoy, hein?" Baroney said, eyeing them as they drew nearer. "Where is the lieutenant, I want to know?"

Terry Miller and John Mountjoy they were; and they staggered and stumbled in their haste at sight of the meat.

"Did you lose the lieutenant? What?"

"No. He's gone on for camp, with the doctor. He sent us in here to eat. Give us some meat, quick."

"Nothing but one turkey and a hare for the three of us, these four days past," panted Terry, as he and John sucked and gobbled. "And in the last two days nothing at all."

"Go far?" Stub queried, eager to know.

"Away up, twenty-five miles or two camps above where the rest o' you left us. Up to where the river petered out to a brook betwixt the mountains. Then we turned back and traveled day and night with our clothes froze stiff on us, and our stomachs clean empty, to ketch the main camp. The cap'n was

worrying more about the other men than himself."

"And sure, when we met the doctor, by chance, with news of this meat, the little cap'n told us to come in and eat, but he wouldn't. He went on—him and the doctor—hungry as he was, to find the camp below," mumbled John. "They'll send hosses. How many did you kill? Four?"

"Four," assured Baroney. "Stub one, the doctor one, I myself had the fortune to kill two. Stub, he found them; but it was the good God who put them there, waiting for us."

"I suppose we might have a bit of a fire, and eat like Christians, whilst waiting?" Terry proposed wistfully.

"The marrow is strong; we must not get sick," Baroney wisely counseled. "Let us butcher, and be ready for the horses; and to-morrow we will all have a big Christmas dinner."

"To-morrow Christmas?" exclaimed John. "Right you are! Hooray for Christmas!"

They cheered for Christmas; and with aching brain Stub puzzled over the new word.

Toward the last of their butchering Corporal Jerry Jackson and Hugh Menaugh arrived with two horses. The camp was famished, the lieutenant and the doctor had toiled in, and now everybody there

was waiting for the buffalo meat. The camp had been out of food for two days.

"I told the doctor that the boy an' his pistol would fetch him luck," Hugh declared. "An' it surely did. Faith, a fine little hunter you be, Stub, me lad."

They loaded the horses, at full speed, and made for the starving camp. It was a joyous place. John Sparks had come in with more good news—he had discovered another buffalo herd and had killed four, himself! Men and horses were out, to get the meat.

Now with eight buffalo on hand, Christmas Eve was to be celebrated to-night, and Christmas Day to-morrow. They were American feasts—feasts for the Spanish and French and all white people, too, the doctor and Sergeant Bill said. Stub had heard the names before, somewhere; perhaps from the French traders. But he quit thinking and bothering. He was an American, they were his feasts now; Lieutenant Pike looked happy, and that was enough.

XIV

A TRAIL OF SURPRISES

THE lieutenant had explored the source of this Red River far enough. He was ready to march on down, for the plains and the United States post of Natchitoches above the mouth in Louisiana. Everybody was glad.

The big meals of buffalo meat had made several of the men, and Stub also, quite ill; so that on the day after Christmas the march covered only seven miles. The tent was turned into a hospital, and the lieutenant and the doctor slept out in the snow.

The Great White Mountains, far to the east, had been in sight from high ground; the river appeared to lead in that direction. But here at the lower end of the bottom-land other mountains closed in. The river coursed through, and everybody rather believed that by following it they all would come out, in two or three days, into the open.

That proved to be a longer job than expected, and the toughest yet. The river, ice-bound but full of air-holes, sometimes broadened a little, and gave hope, but again was hemmed clear to its borders by tre-

mendous precipices too steep to climb. The poor horses slipped and floundered upon the ice and rocks; in places they had to be unpacked and the loads were carried on by hand.

Soon the lieutenant was ordering sledges built, to relieve the horses of the loads; men and horses both pulled them—and now and then sledge and horse broke through the ice and needs must be hauled out of the water.

Twelve miles march, another of sixteen miles, five miles, eight miles, ten and three-quarter miles, about five miles—and the river still twisted, an icy trail, deep set among the cliffs and pinnacles and steep snowy slopes that offered no escape to better country.

The horses were so crippled that some could scarcely walk; the men were getting well bruised, too; the dried buffalo meat had dwindled to a few mouthfuls apiece, and the only game were mountain sheep that kept out of range. The doctor and John Brown had been sent ahead, to hunt them and hang the carcasses beside the river, for the party to pick up on the way.

From camp this evening the lieutenant and Baroney climbed out, to the top, in order to see ahead. They came down with good news.

"We've sighted an open place, before," said

the lieutenant, gladly. "It's not more than eight miles. Another day's march, my men, and I think we'll be into the prairie and at the end of all this scrambling and tumbling."

That gave great hope, although they were too tired to cheer.

But on the morrow the river trail fought them harder than ever. Toward noon they had gained only a scant half mile. The horses had been falling again and again, the sledges had stuck fast on the rocks and in the holes, the ice and snow and rocks behind were blood-stained from the wounds of men and animals.

Now they had come to a narrow spot, where a mass of broken rocks, forming a high bar, thrust itself out from the cliff, into the stream, and where the water was flowing over the ice itself. The horses balked and reared, while the men tugged and shoved.

"Over the rocks," the lieutenant ordered.

That brought more trouble. Stub's yellow pony, thin and scarred like the rest, was among those that still carried light packs. He was a stout, plucky pony—or had been. Here he lost heart, at last. His hoofs were sore, he was worn out. Terry Miller hauled at his neck-thong, Stub pushed at his braced haunches. The line was in a turmoil, while

BUT STUB NEVER FELT THE FINAL CRASH

everybody worked; the canyon echoed to the shouts and blows and frenzied, frightened snorting.

Suddenly the yellow pony's neck-thong snapped; he recoiled threshing, head over heels, before Stub might dodge from him; and down they went, together, clear into the river. But Stub never felt the final crash. On his way he saw a burst of stars, then he plunged into night and kept right on plunging until he woke up.

He had landed. No, he was still going. That is, the snow and cliffs at either side were moving, while he sat propped and bewildered, dizzily watching them.

His head throbbed. He put his hand to it, and felt a bandage. But whose bowed back was that just before? And what was that noise, of crunching and rasping? Ah! He was on a sledge—he was stowed in the baggage upon a sledge, and was being hauled—over the ice and snow—through the canyon—by—by——

Freegift Stout! For the man doing the hauling turned his face, and was Freegift Stout!

Well, well! Freegift halted, and let the sled run on to him. He shouted also; they had rounded a curve and there was another loaded sled, and a man for it; and they, too, stopped.

"Hello. Waked at last, have ye?" spoke Freegift, with a grin.

"Yes, I guess so." Stub found himself speaking in a surprisingly easy fashion. A prodigious amount of words and notions were whirling through his mind. "Where—where am I, anyhow?"

"Ridin' like a king, down the Red River."

"What for?"

"So's to get out an' reach Natchitoches, like the rest of us."

Stub struggled to sit up farther. Ouch!

"What's your name?" he demanded. Then—"I know. It's Freegift Stout. That other man's Terry Miller. But what's my name?"

"Stub, I reckon."

"Yes; of course it is. That's what they call me. But how did you know? How'd you know I'm 'Stub' for short? I'm Jack. That's my regular name—Jack Pursley. I got captured by the Utahs, from my father; did the Pawnees have me, too? Wish I could remember. I do sort of remember. But I'm a white boy. I'm an American, from Kentucky. And my name's Jack Pursley—Stub for short."

Freegift roundly stared, his mouth agape amidst his whiskers.

"Hey! Come back here, Terry," he called. And Terry Miller came back.

"That crack on the head's set him to talkin' good English an' turned him into a white lad, sure," quoth Freegift. "Did you hear him? Ain't that wonderful, though? His name's Jack Pursley, if you please; an' he answers to Stub, jest the same—an' if that wasn't a smart guess by John Sparks I'll eat my hat when I get one."

"I'll be darned," Terry wheezed, blinking and rubbing his nose. "Jack Pursley, are you? Then where's your dad?"

"I don't know. We were finding gold in the mountains, and the Indians stole me and hit me on the head—and I don't remember everything after that."

"Sho'," said Terry. "How long ago, say?"

"What year is it now, please?"

"We've jest turned into 1807."

"I guess that was three years ago, then."

"And whereabouts in the mountains?"

"Near the head of the Platte River."

"For gosh' sake!" Freegift blurted. "We all jest come from there'bouts. But you didn't say nothin', an' we didn't see no gold."

"I didn't remember."

"Well, we won't be goin' back, though; not for

all the gold in the 'arth. Were you all alone up there?"

"My father—he was there. Some other men had started, but they quit. Then we met the Indians, and they were friendly till they stole me."

"Did they kill your father?"

"I don't know."

"That's a tall story," Freegift murmured, to Terry; and tapped his head. Evidently they didn't believe it. "Where do you think you are now, then?" he asked, of Stub.

"I guess I'm with Lieutenant Pike. But where is he?"

"Well, we'll tell you. You see, that yaller hoss an' you went down together. You got a crack on the head, an' the hoss, he died. We had to shoot him. But we picked you up, because you seemed like worth savin'. The lieutenant put a bandage on you. Then he took the rest of the outfit up out the canyon. The hosses couldn't go on—there wasn't any footin'. But he left Terry an' me to pack the dead hoss's load an' some other stuff that he couldn't carry, on a couple of sledges, an' to fetch them an' you on by river an' meet him below. Understand?"

Stub nodded. How his brain did whirl, trying to patch things together! It was as if he had wak-

ened from a dream, and couldn't yet separate the real from the maybe not.

"We'd best be going on," Terry Miller warned. "We're to ketch the cap'n before night, and we're short of grub."

So the sledges proceeded by the river trail, while Stub lay and pondered. By the pain now and then in his head, when the sledge jolted, he had struck his scar; but somehow he had a wonderful feeling of relief, there. He was a new boy.

The trail continued as rough as ever. Most of the way the two men, John and Terry, had to pull for all they were worth; either tugging to get their sledges around open water by route of the narrow strips of shore, or else slipping and scurrying upon the snowy ice itself. Steep slopes and high cliffs shut the trail in, as before. The gaps on right and left were icy ravines and canyons that looked to be impassible.

The main party were not sighted, nor any trace of them. Toward dusk, which gathered early, Terry, ahead, halted.

"It beats the Dutch where the cap'n went to," he complained. "He got out, and he hasn't managed to get back in, I reckon. Now, what to do?"

"Only thing to do is to camp an' wait till mornin'," answered Freegift. "An' a powerful lone-

some, hungry camp it'll be. But that's soldierin'."

"Well, the orders are to ketch him—or to join him farther down, wherever that may be," said Terry. "But we can't travel by night, in here. So we'll have to camp, and foller out our orders to-morrow."

It was a lonesome camp, and a cold camp, and a hungry camp, here in the dark, frozen depths of the long and silent defile cut by the mysterious river. They munched a few mouthfuls apiece of dried meat; Stub slept the most comfortably, under a blanket upon the sledge; the two men laid underneath a single deer-hide, upon the snow.

They all started on at daybreak. Stub was enough stronger so that he sprang off to lighten the load—even pushed—at the worst places. Indeed, his head was in first-class shape; the scar pained very little. And he had rather settled down to being Jack Pursley again. Only, he wished that he knew just where his father was. Dead? Or alive?

It was slow going, to-day. The river seemed to be getting narrower. Where the current had overflowed and had frozen again, the surface was glary smooth; the craggy shore-line constantly jutted with sudden points and shoulders that forced the sledges out to the middle. The slopes were bare, save for a sprinkling of low bushes and solitary pines, cling-

ing fast to the rocks. Ice glittered where the sun's faint rays struck.

This afternoon, having worked tremendously, they came out into the lieutenant's prairie. At least, it might have been the prairie he had reported—a wide flat or bottom where the hills fell back and let the river breathe.

"Hooray! Here's the place to ketch him," Freegift cheered. And he called: "See any sign o' them, Terry?"

"Nope."

They halted, to scan ahead. All the white expanse was lifeless.

"I swan!" sighed Terry. "Never a sign, the whole day; and now, not a sign here. You'd think this'd be the spot they'd come in at, and wait for a fellow or else leave him word."

"Yes," agreed Freegift, "I would that. Do you reckon they're behind us, mebbe?"

"How's a man to tell, in such a country?" Terry retorted. "They're likely tangled up, with half their hosses down, and the loads getting heavier and heavier. But where, who knows? We'll go on a piece, to finish out the day. We may find 'em lower on, or sign from 'em. If not, we'll have to camp again, and shiver out another night, with nothing to eat. Eh, Stub? At any rate, orders is orders, and we're

to keep travelling by river until we join 'em. If they're behind, they'll discover our tracks, like as not, and send ahead for us."

"Anyhow, we're into open goin'. I'm blamed glad o' that," declared Freegift. "Hooray for the plains, and Natchitoches!"

"Hooray if you like," Terry answered back, puffing. "But 'tisn't any turnpike, you can bet."

Apparently out of the mountains they were; nevertheless still hard put, for the river wound and wound, treacherous with boulders and air-holes, and the snow-covered banks were heavy with willows and brush and long grass.

After about four miles Terry, in the lead, shouted unpleasant news.

"We might as well quit. We're running plumb into another set o' mountains. I can see where the river enters. This is only a pocket."

Freegift and Stub arrived, and gazed. The mountains closed in again, before; had crossed the trail, and were lined up, waiting. Jagged and gleeming in the low western sunlight, they barred the way.

"There's no end to 'em," said Terry, ruefully. "Heigh-hum. 'Pears like the real prairies are a long stint yet. The cap'n will be sore disappointed, if he sees. I don't think he's struck here, though. Anyhow, we'll have to camp—I'm clean tuckered; and

to-morrow try once more, for orders is orders, and I'm right certain he'll find us somewheres, or we'll find him."

So they made camp. Freegift wandered out, looking for wood and for trails. He came in.

"I see tracks, Terry. Two men have been along here—white men, I judge; travellin' down river."

"Only two, you say?"

"Yes. Fresh tracks, just the same."

They all looked, and found the fresh tracks of two men pointing eastward.

"I tell you! Those are the doctor and Brown hunting," Terry proposed. "Wish they'd left some meat. But we may ketch 'em to-morrow. Even tracks are a godsend."

They three had eaten nothing all day; there was nothing to eat, to-night. To Stub, matters looked rather desperate, again. Empty stomach and empty tracks and empty country, winter-bound, gave one a sort of a hopeless feeling. He and Freegift and Terry trudged and trudged and trudged, and hauled and shoved, and never got anywhere. For all they knew, they might be drawing farther and farther away from the lieutenant. But, as Terry said, "orders were orders."

"Well, if we ketch the doctor he'll be mighty interested in that head o' yourn," Freegift asserted, to

Stub. "He's been wantin' to open it up, I heard tell; but mebbe that yaller hoss saved him the trouble."

"He'll not thank the hoss," laughed Terry, grimly. "He'd like to have done the job himself! That's the doctor of it."

Stub privately resolved to show the doctor that there was no need of the "job," now. He felt fine, and he was Jack Pursley.

Nothing occurred during the night; the false prairie of the big pocket remained uninvaded except by themselves. They lingered until about ten o'clock, hoping that the main party might come in.

"No use," sighed Freegift. "We may be losin' time; like as not losin' the doctor. Our orders were, to travel by river till we joined the cap'n."

With one last survey the two men took up their tow-ropes and, Stub ready to lend a hand when needed, they plodded on.

The tracks of the doctor and John Brown led to the gateway before. The space for the river lessened rapidly. Soon the sides were only prodigious cliffs, straight up and down where they faced upon the river, and hung with gigantic icicles and sheeted with ice masses. The river had dashed from one side to the other, so that the boulders were now spattered with frozen spray.

The tracks of the doctor and John Brown had vanished; being free of foot, they might clamber as they thought best. But the sledges made a different proposition. Sometimes, in the more difficult spots amidst ice, rocks and water, two men and a boy scarcely could budge one.

Higher and higher towered the cliffs, reddish where bare, and streaked with motionless waterfalls. The sky was only a seam. Far aloft, there was sunshine, and the snow even dripped; but down in here all was shade and cold. One's voice sounded hollow, and echoes answered mockingly.

The dusk commenced to gather before the shine had left the world above. Stub was just about tired out; the sweat had frozen on the clothes of the two men, and their beards also were stiff with frost.

Now they had come to a stopping-place. There was space for only the river. It was crowded so closely and piled upon itself so deeply, and was obliged to flow so swiftly that no ice had formed upon it beyond its very edges. The cliffs rose abruptly on either side, not a pebble-toss apart, leaving no footway.

The trail had ended.

"I cry 'Enough,'" Terry panted, as the three peered dismayed. "We can't go on—and we can't

spend the night here, either. We'll have to backtrack and find some way out."

"The doctor an' Brown must ha' got out somewheres," Freegift argued. "They never passed here. Let's search whilst there's light. If we can fetch out we may yet sight 'em, or the cap'n. An' failin' better, we can camp again an' bile that deer-hide for a tide-me-over. Some sort o' chawin' we need bad."

"Biled deer-hide for supper, then," Terry answered. "It'll do to fool our stomicks with. But first we got to get out if we can."

They turned back, in the gloomy canyon whose walls seemed to be at least half a mile high, to seek a side passage up and out. Freegift was ahead. There were places where the walls had been sundered by gigantic cracks, piled with granite fragments. Freegift had crossed the river, on boulders and ice patches, to explore a crack opposite—and suddenly a shout hailed him.

"Whoo-ee! Hello!"

He gazed quickly amidst his clambering; waved his arm and shouted reply, and hastened over.

"Somebody!" Terry exclaimed. He and Stub ran forward, stumbling. They rounded a shoulder, and joining Freegift saw the lieutenant. In the gloom they knew him by his red cap if by nothing else. He was alone, carrying his gun.

"I've been looking for you men," he greeted. "You passed us, somehow."

"Yes, sir," Freegift admitted. "An' we've been lookin' for you, too, sir. We didn't know whether you were before or behind."

"And begging your pardon, sir, we're mighty glad to see you," added Terry. "Are the men all behind, the same as yourself, sir?"

"Part of them." The lieutenant spoke crisply. "The doctor and Brown are still ahead, I think. I haven't laid eyes on them. You three were next. The rest of the party is split. From the prairie back yonder I detached Baroney and two men to take the horses out, unpacked, and find a road for them. We have lost several animals by falls upon the rocks, and the others were unable to travel farther by river. The remaining eight men are coming on, two by two, each pair with a loaded sledge. I have preceded them, hoping to overtake you. The command is pretty well scattered out, but doing the best it can." His tired eyes scanned Stub. "How are you, my brave lad?"

"All right, sir. But my name's Jack Pursley, now. That knock I got made me remember."

"What!"

"You see, sir," Freegift explained in haste, and rather as if apologizing for Stub's answer, "when

he come to after that rap on the head he was sort o' bewildered like; an' ever since then he's been claimin' that he's a white boy, name o' Pursley, from Kaintuck, an' was stole from his father, by the Injuns, up in that very Platte River country where we saw all them camp sign."

"Oh!" uttered the lieutenant. "You were there? How many of you? All white? Where's your father? How long ago?"

"About three years, I think," Stub stammered. "Just we two, sir. We were hunting and trading on the plains, with some Kiowas and Comanches, and the Sioux drove us into the mountains. Then we joined the Utahs, and after a while they stole me. They hit me on the head and I forgot a lot of things —and I don't know where my father is, sir."

"Hah! I thought we were the first white men there," ejaculated the lieutenant. "The first Americans, at least. It's a pity you didn't come to before. You might have given us valuable information."

"He says they found gold in that Platte country, sir," said Terry.

"Yes? Pshaw! But no matter now. We'll pursue that subject later. First, we must get out of this canyon. You discovered no passage beyond?"

"No, sir. Never space to set a foot."

"Have you any food?"

"Had none for two days, sir. We were thinking of biling a deer-hide for our supper."

"You're no worse off than the others. The whole column is destitute again, but the men are struggling bravely, scattered as they may be. The doctor and Brown came this way. You haven't sighted them?"

"No, sir; only their tracks, back a piece."

"Then they got out, somehow. We must find their trail before dark, and follow it up top, where there's game. Search well; our comrades behind are depending on us."

They searched on both sides of the canyon. Stub's Indian-wise eyes made the discovery—a few scratches by hands and gun-stocks, in a narrow ravine whose slopes were ice sheeted. That was the place.

They all hurried to the sledges, took what they might carry, and clawing, slipping, clinging, commenced to scale the ravine. It was a slow trail, and a danger trail, but it led them out, to a flat, cedar-strewn top, where daylight still lingered.

"The doctor and Brown have been here," panted the lieutenant. "Here are their tracks."

They followed the tracks a short distance, and brought up at camp sign. Evidently the doctor and Brown had stopped here, the night before; had killed

a deer, too—but there was nothing save a few shreds of hide.

"The birds and beasts have eaten whatever they may have left," spoke the lieutenant. "Too bad, my lads. However, we're out, and we'll make shift some way. Fetch up another load, while I hunt."

Out he went, with his gun. They managed to bring up another load from the sledges. They heard a gunshot.

"Hooray! Meat for supper, after all."

But when he returned in the darkness he was empty-handed.

"I wounded a deer, and lost him," he reported shortly; and he slightly staggered as he sank down for a moment. "We can do no more to-night. We'll melt snow for drinking purposes; but the deer-hide is likely to make us ill, in our present condition. We'll keep it, and to-morrow we'll have better luck."

So with a fire and melted snow they passed the night. Nobody else arrived. The doctor and Brown seemed to be a day's march ahead; Baroney and Hugh Menaugh and Bill Gordon were wandering with the horses through this broken high country; and the other eight were toiling as best they could, with the sledges, in separate pairs, seeking a way out also.

The lieutenant started again, early in the morn-

ing, to find meat for breakfast. They went down into the canyon, to get the rest of the loads, and the sledges—and how they managed, with their legs so weary and their stomachs so empty, Stub scarcely knew.

They heard the lieutenant shoot several times, in the distance; this helped them. He rarely missed. But he came into camp with nothing, and with his gun broken off at the breech—had wounded deer, had discovered that his gun was bent and shot crooked—then had fallen and disabled it completely.

He was exhausted—so were the others; yet he did not give up. He rested only a minute. Then he grabbed up the gun that had been stowed among the baggage. It was only a double-barreled shot-gun, but had to do.

"I'll try again, with this," he said. "You can go no further; I see that. Keep good heart, my lads, and be sure that I'll return at best speed with the very first meat I secure."

"Yes, sir. We'll wait, sir. And good luck to ye," answered Terry.

Sitting numb and lax beside the baggage, they watched the lieutenant go stumbling and swerving among the cedars, until he had disappeared.

"A great-hearted little officer," Freegift remarked. "Myself, I couldn't take another step.

I'm clean petered out, at last. But him—away he goes, never askin' a rest."

"And he'll be back. You can depend on that," put in Terry. "Yes. He'll not be thinking of himself. He's thinking mainly on his men. He'll be back with the meat, before he eats a bite."

They heard nothing. The long day dragged; sometimes they dozed—they rarely moved and they rarely spoke; they only waited. Up here it was very quiet, with a few screaming jays fluttering through the low trees. Stub caught himself nodding and dreaming: saw strange objects, grasped at meat, and woke before he could eat. He wondered if Freegift and Terry saw the same.

The sun set, the air grew colder.

"Another night," Freegift groaned. "He's not comin'. Now what if he's layin' out somewheres, done up!"

"If he's still alive he's on his feet, and seeking help for us," Terry asserted. "He said to wait and he'd come. You can depend on him. Orders be orders. He found us, below, and he'll find us here."

"We've got to suck deer-hide, then," announced Freegift. "It may carry us over."

They managed to arouse themselves; half boiled strips of deer-hide in a kettle of snow-water, and

chewed at the hairy, slimy stuff. But they couldn't swallow it.

"Oh, my!" Terry sighed. "'Tain't soup nor meat, nor what I'd call soldiers' fare at all. We had hard times before, up the Mississippi with the left'-nant; but we didn't set teeth to this. What'd I ever enlist for?"

"The more I don't know," answered Freegift. "But stow one good meal in us an' we'd enlist over again, to foller the cap'n on another trip."

Terry tried to grin.

"I guess you're right. But, oh my! Down the Red River, heading for white man's country, is it? Then where are we? Nowhere at all, and like to stay."

Through the gnarled cedars beside the mighty canyon the shadows deepened. The mountain ridges and peaks, near and far, surrounding the lone flat, swiftly lost their daytime tints as the rising tide of night flowed higher and higher. And soon it was dark again.

Now they must wait for another morning as well as for the lieutenant.

They had already sickened of the deer-hide, and could not touch it again. So the morning was breakfastless. The sun had been up only a few minutes,

and Stub was drowsing in a kind of stupor, when he heard Freegift exclaim:

"He's comin', boys! Here comes the cap'n! Say! Don't I see him—or not?"

"There's two of 'em!" cried Terry. "He's found company. No! That ain't the cap'n. It's somebody else. But our men, anyhow."

Two men afoot were hastening in through the cedars, along the canyon rim. They carried packages—meat! They were Hugh Menaugh and Bill Gordon. Hooray!

"Hello to you!"

"Yes, we're still here," replied Terry. "And if you've fetched anything to eat, out with it quick. Where's the cap'n? Did you see him?"

Hugh and Bill busied themselves.

"Yes, we met up with him last evenin', below, down river. He hadn't come back to you, 'cause he hadn't killed anything. But Baroney and us were packin' buffalo meat and deer meat both, and he sent us two out to find you first thing this mornin', soon as 'twas light enough to s'arch. After you've fed, we'll help you on to camp."

"Who else is there?"

"Just the cap'n and Baroney, but they're expectin' the doctor and Brown. Them two are somewheres in the neighborhood. The cap'n fired a gun

as signal to 'em. We'll have to look for the other fellers."

"What kind of a camp, an' whereabouts?" Freegift asked, as he and Terry and Stub greedily munched.

"Oh, a good camp, in the open, not fur from the river."

Hugh and Bill acted oddly—with manner mysterious as if they were keeping something back. After the meal, Hugh opened up.

"Now that you've eaten, guess I'll tell you what's happened," he blurted. "You'll know it, anyhow."

"Anybody dead? Not the cap'n!"

"No. Nothing like that. But this ain't the river."

"Ain't the Red River?"

"Nope."

The three stared, dazed.

"What river might it be, then?" gasped Freegift.

"The Arkansaw ag'in. An' camp's located on that very same spot in the dry valley where we struck north last December, scarce a month ago!" *

* That was the remarkable and disappointing fact. From the heads of the Platte River they simply had passed southwestward to the head of the Arkansas, had fought their way down through the Grand Canyon of the Arkansas to the Royal Gorge, and crossing around this were completing a big circle to the Cañon City region again.

"It's certainly hard on the little cap'n," Bill added. "Yesterday, his worst day of all, when near dead he made out and espied the landmarks, was his birthday, too."

"What's the date?" Terry queried. "I've forgot."

"Fifth o' January. To-day's the sixth. It was December 10 when we camped yonder before."

XV

NOT YET DEFEATED

Helped by Hugh Menaugh and Bill Gordon they might now travel on for the lieutenant's camp. They had to cross several gulches and one or two ridges; then they came out into view of the dry valley, at the foot of which the Arkansaw issued from the mountains, to course eastward through the foothills and down to the plains far beyond.

It was the same valley. They might see again the Grand Peak, distant in the north, and mark the line of the river, nearer in the south. From the ridges they had been enabled to sight the Great Snow Mountains, also in the south and much farther than the Grand Peak in the opposite direction. Yes, this was the Arkansaw, and the lieutenant had missed his guess by a wide margin.

He was waiting at the camp. He greeted them kindly, but was haggard and seemed much cut up over the result of all his hard marches. No one could resist being sorry for him.

The doctor and John Brown were here, too. They had brought in six deer, so that now there was plenty of meat on hand.

It was two more days before the last of the

men had straggled in. Meanwhile the doctor especially had been interested in the new " Jack Pursley," otherwise Stub; had examined his head, and together with the lieutenant had asked him questions. But as Stub stuck to his story, they had to accept it; appeared rather to believe it—the doctor in particular.

Considerable of their talk, between themselves, Stub did not understand. There was something about " removal of pressure," " resumption of activity," " clearing up of brain area," and so forth, which really meant nothing to Stub, except that now he knew who he was and the spot under his scar no longer burned or weighed like lead.

If he might only find his father, whose name, he remembered, was James, and if the lieutenant might find the Red River after all, then he would be perfectly happy.

The lieutenant acted somewhat worried. He did not know quite what to do next. He did not like to waste time; but instead of having found the Red River, after a month of search which had lost him horses and crippled others and almost had lost him men also, here he was with nothing gained except a little information about the mountain country north.

But he was not a man to shilly-shally. He and the doctor, and sometimes Baroney, talked earnestly

together; on the day after the last of the squads had arrived, and when everybody had eaten well and had rested, he called a council.

"I have decided to make another attempt, men," he said. "We are soldiers, and our duty to our orders and our Flag demands that we do not admit defeat. The thought of defeat is unworthy of brave men. It is far better to die with honor, in the knowledge that we have done our utmost, than to live as cowards and weaklings. Fortune has been trying us out, but she will not find us lacking. We have explored to the north, and we know that the Red River does not lie there. That much has been accomplished, and not in vain, for we have made important discoveries and greatly extended the Government's knowledge of the sources of the Platte and the Arkansaw Rivers. It will be impossible to travel onward with the horses. We have lost a number of them, and the remainder are unfit. So I propose to stay here a few days, in order to erect a block-house and gather meat. Then I shall leave the horses, and the useless baggage, with two men in charge; and with the rest of you shall strike southward to cross the next divide, in the vicinity of the Great White Mountains, where, I am positive, we shall emerge upon the head streams of the Red River. We have demonstrated the fact that the Red River can lie only in that direction. From there

we will send back for the horses, which by that time will be recovered; and we will descend along the river to the civilization of our own people and the just reward, I trust, of a Country appreciative of your efforts."

Sergeant Meek faced the men and flourished his lean arm.

"Three cheers for the cap'n and the Red River, boys! Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!"

They all spent the next four days in building the block-house with logs, and in hunting. A good pasture was found, for the wretched horses. John Sparks made a new stock for the lieutenant's broken gun.

Baroney and Pat Smith were to stay here. Although a great deal of the baggage, including the lieutenant's own trunk with his "chief's" uniform, was left also, what with the ammunition and axes and spades, and the presents in case the Comanches or other Indians should be met, and the meat, the lieutenant and the doctor and the eleven men carried each seventy pounds, weighed out equally, and Stub himself had a pack.

Followed by a good-luck cheer from Baroney and Pat, they marched out from the block-house on the morning of January 14, southward bound across

the Arkansaw, to find the Red River down in the region of the Great White Mountains.

The first day they marched thirteen miles; the doctor killed a deer. The second day they marched nineteen miles, up along a stream that opened a way for them to the mountains; the lieutenant and the doctor and John Sparks each killed a deer. On the third day they marched up the same stream, eighteen miles, in a snowstorm; and nobody killed anything. So to-night they pretty well finished their meat. Travelling afoot in winter was hungry work, and they could carry only a little at a time.

On the fourth day they marched twenty-eight miles—and a bad day it proved to be. The Great White Mountains had been getting nearer, at this end—their upper end. They formed a tremendous snowy chain stretching northwest and southeast. The stream came down from them, and they were about to bar the trail. Upon the east there were lesser mountains. But no Red River flowed in this broad trough between the two ranges; its streams fed the Arkansaw River; therefore the Red River must lie upon the farther, or western side, of the Great White range.*

* These Great White Mountains of Lieutenant Pike are the Sangre de Cristo Range of Southern Colorado. They extend from the Arkansas River above the Grand Canyon clear

The mountains seemed to rise from a bare prairie which grew no wood. The lieutenant had left the stream, so as to aim more directly for a low place in the range; but he was not to cross, to-day. The range was farther than it looked to be. The sun set—and here they were, in the cold open, without wood or water either, or a bite to eat.

"There's timber at the base of those first slopes," he said. "We'll have to push on, men, until we reach it. The night will be too cold for existing with no fires."

Suddenly they were barred by the creek, and needs must ford it through ice that broke under their moccasins. It was long after dark, and was stinging cold, when they arrived at the trees. The men stumbled wearily; Stub could not feel his feet at all. Nobody had complained, though—but when the fires had been built and they all started to thaw themselves out, the doctor found that nine pairs of

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into New Mexico, and are a noble snowy range indeed. The early Spanish explorers from the south named them Sangre de Cristo, or Blood of Christ, because when first sighted they were bathed red in the reflection from a New Mexico sunset. And this frequently is their sunset coloring today. From the block-house beyond present Cañon City north of the Arkansas River the Pike men had marched south across the river, and probably had followed up Grape Creek, which descends from the east slope of the Sangre de Cristo—the Great White Mountains.

feet had been frozen, among the men, with Stub's pair to be included.

He, and the lieutenant, Sergeant Meek and Terry Miller were the only ones to have escaped! John Sparks and young Tom Dougherty were the worst off. Their feet were solid white to their ankles. Hugh Menaugh and Jake Carter were badly off, too. The doctor did his best—everybody rubbed hard with snow, and several groaned from the pain; but there was nothing to eat and the thermometer dropped to more than eighteen degrees below zero or freezing.

With cold, hunger and aching feet it was a hard night. The lieutenant sent Sergeant Meek and Terry out early in the morning, to hunt in one direction; he and the doctor made ready to hunt in another.

"Do the best you can, lads," they encouraged, as they set forth. "We've all been in tight places before, and have come out safely. Wait now in patience, and you shall have the first meat that's killed."

It was another long day: a cold, bleak day for this open camp on the edge of the snow-laden pines and cedars, with the Great White Mountains overlooking, on the one hand, as far as eye might see, and the wide prairie bottoms stretching lone and lifeless on the other hand.

Stub's feet were swollen, puffy and tender, but

he could walk. He and Corporal Jerry Jackson and Alex Roy managed to keep the fires going. John Sparks and Tom Dougherty lay suffering until the sweat stood on their foreheads. Their feet seemed to be turning black, and were alive with sharp pains.

"Sure, we're like never to walk ag'in, Tom," John moaned. "Our country'll owe us each a pair o' feet."

"I know that, John. But what'll we do wid those we have? That's what's botherin' me. 'Tis cruel hard."

"'Tis harder on you than on me, lad," John declared. "For you're young. An' still, I'd like to do a bit more marchin', myself."

They heard never a sound from the hunters, all day. At dark the sergeant and Terry Miller came in, completely tuckered. They had not fired a shot; had seen no game, nor seen the lieutenant and the doctor, either.

"We'll have to pull our belts in another notch, boys," quoth the sergeant. "And trust to them other two. Had they found meat, they'd be in. If they don't come to-night, they'll come to-morrow. 'Tis tough for you, here by the fire; but it's tougher on them, out yonder somewheres in the cold, with their hearts aching at the thought of us waiting and depending on 'em. Jest the same, I'd rather be any

one of us, in our moccasins as we are, than Henry Kennerman serving time in his boots."

Henry Kennerman was a soldier who had deserted on the way to the Osage towns.

The next day was the fourth without food. It passed slowly. The feet of some of the men, like those of Stub, were much better; but John Sparks and young Tom could not stand, and Hugh Menaugh and Jake Carter could not walk.

Toward evening the sergeant grew very uneasy; alarm settled over them all. No tidings of any kind had arrived from the lieutenant and Doctor Robinson.

"We'll wait, the night," finally said Sergeant Meek. "In the morning 'twill be up to us, for if we sit here longer we'll be too weak to move. We'll divide up, those of us who can walk. A part'll have to search for them two men, for maybe they're needing help worse'n we are, and 'tis the duty of a soldier never to abandon his officers. The rest'll look for meat again. And we'll none of us come in till we fetch either news or meat. Shame on us if we can't turn to and help our officers and ourselves."

"You're right. There's nobody can blame the cap'n an' the doctor. They've never spared themselves. We'll all do our best, sergeant."

"Only lend me a pair o' fate, any wan o' yez

whose heart's too heavy for 'em, an' I'll look for the cap'n meself," appealed Tom Dougherty.

They kept up the fires and tried to sleep. The black, cold night deepened; overhead the steely stars spanned from prairie to dark slopes. The Great Bear of the sky, which contained the Pointers that told the time, drifted across, ranging on his nightly trail.

Suddenly, at midnight, they heard a faint, breathless "Whoo-ee!" And while they listened, another.

"'Tis the cap'n and the doctor!" the sergeant exclaimed. "Hooray! Give 'em a yell, now, all together. Build up the fires."

They yelled. They were answered, through the darkness—and presently through the same darkness the lieutenant—and the doctor—came staggering in, bending low, to the fire-light.

Meat!

"Here you are, my lads!" the lieutenant panted. He dropped the load from his back, swayed, sank to his knees, and the sergeant sprang to catch him.

"We're all right, sir. We knew you'd be coming. You're a welcome sight, sir, meat or no meat. We were getting anxious about you and the doctor, sir."

"I'll tend to him, sergeant," gasped the doctor. "You be helping the men with the meat. Don't let 'em over-eat. There's more, back where we killed."

The lieutenant had almost fainted. It was several minutes before he could speak again. He and the doctor had had a terrible two days. The doctor said that they had wounded a buffalo with three balls, the first evening, but it had made off. All that night they had sat up, among some rocks, nearly freezing to death while they waited for morning. Then they had sighted a herd of buffalo, at daybreak, and had crawled a mile through the snow—had shot eight times, wounded three, and the whole herd had escaped.

That second day they had tramped until the lieutenant was about spent with hunger and lack of rest. Matters had looked very bad. But they both decided that they would rather die looking for game, than return and disappoint the men. Just at dusk, when they were aiming for a point of timber, there to spend another night, they saw a third herd of buffalo. The lieutenant managed to run and hide behind a cedar. When the buffalo were about to pass, he shot, and this time crippled one. The doctor ran, and with three more shots they killed the buffalo. Hurrah!

Then they butchered it, without stopping to eat; and carrying as much as they could they had traveled for six hours, bringing the meat to the camp.

"It's a story hard to beat," said Sergeant Meek, simply. "You may not be one of the army, yourself,

sir; but as officer and man we're proud to follow you —you and the cap'n, sir."

"The lieutenant and I wondered what you men were thinking, when we didn't return." the doctor proffered. "You had a right to expect us sooner? Did you plan to march on and try to save your lives?"

"No, sir; not exactly that," replied rugged Sergeant Meek. "We knew you hadn't forgotten us, and there was no complaining. Seemed like we'd best search for you, and the same time find meat if we could; and that we'd ha' done, the first thing in the morning, sir."

"Your plan, and the way with which you received us, do you all credit before the world," spoke the lieutenant, who overheard. "As your comrades we thank you, men; and as your officer I am proud of you. My reports to General Wilkinson and the Secretary of War shall not omit the devotion to duty that has characterized your whole march."

XVI

BLOCKED BY THE GREAT WHITE MOUNTAINS

JOHN SPARKS and Tom Dougherty were to be left behind. That was the word.

"What?"

"Yes. The doctor says not a step shall they march, if they would save their feet; an' poor Tom, he's like to lose his, anyhow. An' since they can't march, no more can we carry 'em across the mountains without hosses. So here they stay till we can send an' get 'em."

All the buffalo meat had been brought in. The lieutenant was preparing to march on, for the Red River. From the camp he had explored farther westward, to the very foot of the mountains, seeking a trail over; but the snow was four and five feet deep even there, the whole country above was white, and he gave the trail up.

"We'll have to march on south along this side, until we find a better place."

Now they made ready. John Sparks and Tom were fixed as comfortably as possible, with guns and ammunition, a lean-to for shelter, and the best

buffalo-robes, and wood and meat. Their packs, and the packs of Hugh Menaugh and Jake Carter (who barely could hobble, using their muskets as crutches) were hidden under trees.

Sturdy red-haired John and young Tom felt badly. So did everybody. The lieutenant's voice broke, as he said:

"We aren't deserting you, my lads. Never think of that. As surely as we live we will send for you, the very first thing, as soon as we locate a desirable camping spot, to which to bring down the horses. That will not be long; we have only to cross these mountains. Rather than desert you, if I should be the last man alive in the party I would return, myself, and die with you. Whatever happens, meet it like soldiers, bearing in mind that you are suffering for your Country. It is far preferable to perish thus, in the wilderness, in discharge of duty, rather than to forfeit honor by evading hardships and toil like the disloyal Kennerman."

"Oh, sir! We'll act the man, sir," they replied. "We'll keep a stiff upper lip, an' be waitin' for the hosses to come get us."

The lieutenant shook hands with them; the doctor shook hands with them.

"Now take care of those feet," he urged.

Everybody shook hands with them.

"Good-by, lads."

"Good-by to yez. God send yez safe to the Red River, an' we'll join yez there, all bound home together."

"For'd, march!" barked the lieutenant. His voice was husky. There were tears freezing on his cheeks.

"For'd, men," rasped old Sergeant Meek, and blew his nose violently.

A number of the other men were sniffling and blowing, and Stub choked as he blindly trudged. Bluff Hugh Menaugh growled gently to himself, while he and Jake hobbled.

As long as they could see the little camp and the two figures sitting they occasionally turned and waved; and John and Tom waved answer.

"Well, we did our best for 'em," sighed Corporal Jerry. "We took only one meal o' meat. They have the rest. 'Twill get 'em through, like as not."

"Yes. Once across these mountains, to the Red River, and we'll send for them and the hosses."

This evening the one meal of meat was eaten. A little snow fell. In the morning the lieutenant ordered Sergeant Meek to take the party on, while he and the doctor hunted. The day was dark and lowering. Then the storm set in again, snowing furiously. By noon the snow was knee high; they

could not see ten feet around; Hugh and Jake were unable to move farther; the lieutenant and the doctor were still out—perhaps lost, like themselves.

"'Tis no use, men. We'll make for the nearest timber and camp there," ordered Sergeant Meek.

That was another miserably cold, hungry day, and a worse night.

"How flesh and blood may be expected to stand more of this, I don't know," uttered John Brown.

"And it's not for you to ask," the sergeant sternly rebuked. "If you're so weak-hearted as to think them thoughts, keep 'em to yourself. Even the lad Stub—a mere boy that he is—speaks no such words. Shame on you—you a soldier!"

John Brown muttered, but said no more.

"Heaven help the cap'n an' the doctor, again," spoke Corporal Jerry, as they all huddled about their fire, and the wind howled and the snow hissed, and the drifts piled higher against their little bulwark of packs. "An' if they don't find us an' we don't find them, 'twill go hard with Sparks and Dougherty, too."

"If the storm clears, we'll march on in the morning," said Sergeant Meek. "We've had orders to meet 'em, on a piece yet, and that's our duty."

The morning dawned gray and white, but the storm had ceased. They shook off the snow, re-

shouldered their packs, and guns in hand stiffly started. The snow was thigh high; the Great White Mountains looming in a long front without end on their right were whiter than ever; the bottoms and the more distant mountains on their left were white. It was snow, snow, snow, everywhere; the very dead of winter.

Now (Good!) here came the lieutenant and the doctor, ploughing down a slope, their packs on their backs, but nothing else. Snowy and breathing hard, they arrived. The men, plodding, had seen; and having given up hope plodded on, saying not a word. Only Sergeant Meek greeted, saluting as best he might:

"All well, cap'n. Good morning to you, sirs."

"No luck this time, sergeant," wheezed the lieutenant, cheerily, but with face pinched and set. "We missed you, and spent the night together in the snow."

"Yes, sir. We couldn't see, for the storm, sir, and had to camp in the nearest shelter."

"You did right, sergeant. The storm was so thick that I found even the compass of little help. The doctor and I became separated and were fearful that we had lost each other as well as the party. Halt the men."

"Squad, halt," rasped the sergeant.

The men waited, panting and coughing.

"It's evident there are no buffalo down in the open, lads," spoke the lieutenant. "The doctor and I have sighted never a one nor any sign of one. The storm has driven them back and higher, into the timber. We'll make in the same direction, and be crossing the mountains while seeking meat."

He and the doctor led off, heading westward, to climb the Great White Mountains. The route commenced to get more rolling—up and down, up and down, over the rounded foothills concealed by the snow. 'Twas leg-wearying, breath-taking work. The snow grew deeper. In the hollows it had gathered shoulders high; upon the slopes it was waist high. The little column was straggling. Stub, the smallest member, trying to tread in the broken trail, was at times almost buried.

In an hour they all had covered a pitiful distance; to be sure, the prairie was somewhat below, but the real mountains seemed far above, and the silent timber still awaited, in a broad belt.

The lieutenant and the doctor had halted. They turned and began to plough back. The little column, steaming with the vapor from lungs and bodies, drew nearer to them.

"The snow is too deep, here, lads," the lieutenant called, as he and the doctor passed in front of the file. His voice was tired; anybody might have

thought him discouraged—and little wonder. "We'll have to keep lower down, and try elsewhere."

"To the famine country of the open bottoms," he said. Were they never to get across these Great White Mountains, which faced them unending? Were they to die in the snow, just for the sake of hunting the Red River? John Brown, near the head of the column, broke restraint again and exclaimed roundly:

"I say, it's more than flesh an' blood can bear, to march three days with not a mouthful of food, through snow three feet deep, an' carry loads only fit for hosses!"

Everybody heard. Sergeant Meek turned on him angrily. Had the lieutenant heard also? No? Yes! He had paused for an instant, as if to reply; then without another sign he had proceeded.

"You'll be called to answer for this, Brown," warned the sergeant.

John muttered to himself, and a silence fell upon the file. Stooped and unsteady under their own loads, the lieutenant and the doctor doggedly continued, breaking the trail on course obliquing for the lower country. The others followed, breathing hard.

The lieutenant and the doctor had struck down a shallow draw. Issuing from the end of it, they

were out of sight. When the head of the column arrived at the same spot, there were only the two packs, and a message scrawled with a ramrod on the snow. Sergeant Meek read.

"We see buffalo. Camp in nearest timber and wait. Z. M. P."

Every eye sprang to search the landscape. There! Far down, upon the prairie! Black dots—slowly moving across! Buffalo! And where were the hunters? Their tracks pointed onward from the two packs. See! They were running, crouched, down among the billowy swells, as if to head the animals off. It was a desperate chance.

"The breeze is with us," Sergeant Meek cried hopefully. "Quick! For that timber tip, yon, and keep out o' sight. Trust the cap'n and the doctor to do their best. Let's take no risk of spoiling their chance."

The column hustled, with strength renewed. The tip of timber was about a mile distant. The buffalo had disappeared behind a knoll of the prairie; the last seen of the lieutenant and the doctor, they were hastening—stumbling and falling and lunging again, to reach the same knoll. The doctor had forged ahead. He was stronger than the lieutenant.

Then the scene was swallowed up by a dip in the trail to the timber.

Next, a dully-sounding gunshot! But only one. The doctor probably had fired—perhaps at long distance. Had he landed—disabled, or only wounded, or missed? Nothing could yet be seen. The men, and Stub, their lungs almost bursting, shambled as fast as possible. Just as they emerged at the point of timber, other shots boomed: two, close together. Hooray! That meant business. They paused, puffing, to gaze.

Again hooray! Down near the knoll a black spot blotched the snow. At one side of it there were other black spots, some still, some moving in and out. It was the herd, and seemed confused. Look! From the black spot, off by itself—a dead buffalo, that!—smoke puffs darted and spread. The buffalo herd surged a little, but did not run. The lieutenant and the doctor were lying behind the carcass and shooting.

"One, anyway, lads!" cheered Sergeant Meek. "Maybe more. Off with your packs, now. Roy, Mountjoy, Stout, Brown, you cut wood; the rest of us'll be clearing a space. There'll be meat in camp before long, and we'll have fires ready."

They all worked fast. No one now felt tired. The hunt down below sounded like a battle. The lieutenant and the doctor were firing again and again, as rapidly as they might load and aim. Toiling

with ax and spade and hands, the column, making camp, scarcely paused to watch; but presently the firing ceased—the buffalo herd were lumbering away, at last, with one, two, three of them gradually dropping behind, to stagger, waver, and suddenly pitch, dead! Meat, and plenty of it!

The lieutenant and the doctor were busy, butchering the carcass that had shielded them. They wasted no time. Here they came, loaded well. The fires were crackling and blazing, in readiness; and when they panted in, spent, bloody and triumphant, the camp cheered hoarsely.

"Eat, boys," gasped the lieutenant. "Fortune has favored us. There's more meat below. But we'll eat first."

Everybody hacked and tore at the red humps, and in a jiffy the strips from them were being thrust into the fire by ramrods; without waiting for more than a scorching and a warming through, the men devoured like wolves. With the meat juice daubing his chin and staining the men's beards, Stub thought that never before had he tasted such sweetness. He forgot his other hungers.

Whew! One by one the men drew back, to chew the last mouthfuls, and light pipes, contented. The meat all had vanished.

"Send Brown to me, sergeant," the lieutenant

ordered. There was something *he* had not forgotten.

John Brown arose and shambled to where the lieutenant and the doctor were sitting. He looked sheepish and frightened. The lieutenant stood, to front him; did not acknowledge his salute, but scanned him sternly, his haggard eyes commencing to blaze bluely.

" Brown, you this day presumed to make use of language that was seditious and mutinous; I then passed it over, pitying your situation and laying your conduct to your distress from hunger, rather than to desire to sow discontent amongst the party. Had I saved provisions for ourselves, whilst you were starving," reproached the lieutenant; " had we been marching along light and at our ease, whilst you were weighed down with your burden, then you would have had some excuse for your remarks: but when we all were equally hungry, weary, worn, and charged with burdens which I believe my natural strength is less able to bear than any man's in the party—when we are always foremost in breaking the road, reconnoitering and enduring the fatigues of the chase, it was the height of ingratitude in you to let an expression escape that showed discontent. Your ready compliance and firm perseverance I had reason to expect, as the leader of men who are my companions in misery and danger. But your duty

as a soldier (the young lieutenant's voice rang, and his eyes flashed) called on your obedience to your officer, and a suppression of such language. However, for this time I will pardon; but I assure you, should that ever be repeated, I will answer your ingratitude and punish your disobedience by instant death."

John Brown had shrunk and whitened.

"Yes, sir," he faltered. "Thank you, sir. I'll remember. It shan't happen again."

"You may go." The lieutenant's eyes left Brown's face and traveled over the other men. "I take this opportunity," he said, "likewise to express to you, soldiers, generally, my thanks for your obedience, perseverance, and ready contempt of every danger, which you have in common shown. And I assure you that nothing shall be lacking on my part to procure you the rewards of our Government and the gratitude of your countrymen."

"Three cheers for the cap'n, lads," shouted Sergeant Meek. "Hooray, now! Hooray! Hooray!"

"We're with you to the end, sir!"

"We're not complainin', sir. No more is Brown."

"You're the leader, sir, and we're proud to follow."

"Sure, you an' the doctor do the hard work."

Thus they cried, bravely and huskily; for who could help loving this stanch little officer, who asked no favors of rank, except to lead, and who now stood before them, in his stained red fur-lined cap, his wet, torn blanket-coat, his bedraggled thin blue trousers and soaked, scuffed moccasins. He was all man.

He raised his hand. His face had flushed, his eyes had softened moistly, and his lips quivered.

" That will do, lads. We understand each other, and I'm sure Brown will not repeat his offense. For my part, I am determined that we shall not move again without a supply of food. That imperils our success, and is more than our duty would require of us."

" Still, we might have made good, hadn't we left the bulk of our meat with Sparks and Dougherty, back yonder," Freegift Stout remarked, to the others in his mess. " That's what pinched us."

XVII

THE FORT IN THE WILDERNESS

Across the Great White Mountains at last!

That had proved to be not such a hard trip, after all, although uncomfortable on account of the snow. First, the meat from the other buffalo (three) had been brought into camp—had been sliced and the strips hung on frames, to dry. There was a great quantity of it; more than could be carried on foot. So Hugh Menaugh, whose frozen feet still crippled him badly, was left to guard the extra amount, at this supply depot; and, loaded well, the twelve others marched on.

The lieutenant and the doctor led into the mountains. Now was the time to cross while the men had meat and felt strong. In spite of the snow three feet deep they made fourteen miles, following the low places; and at evening they were over—they had come upon a stream flowing west! It surely was a feeder of the Red River!

Again they all cheered. But if they were over, they were not yet through, for ahead they could see only the same bald or timbered swells and ridges, snow-covered and still without end.

Near noon, the next day, the lieutenant and the doctor, in the advance as usual, turned and gladly beckoned, and pointed before. They all hastened. The signs were good—the brush had been flattened or cut off, down a long draw, and the trees had been blazed and curiously painted with rude figures. It was an Indian pass.

The lieutenant and the doctor had gone on. When the others arrived at the spot, they saw.

"We're coming out, boys!"

"We'll be out before night!"

A separate, distant range of mountains might be sighted, through the gap made by the blazed trail; and below, nearer, there was glimpse of the low country, bordered on this side by bare sandy foothills of these Great White Mountains themselves.

At sunset they were down and into the open, between the timbered slopes and the rolling sand-hills. On the west, beyond the sand-hills there appeared to be a wide valley; and beyond the valley that other range of mountains.

Camp had to be made soon, here at the base of the Great White Mountains. The lieutenant went out alone, to climb the sand-hills, for a view. They could see him, a small figure, toiling up and standing, to peer through his spy-glass. He came back in the dusk, but his face was aglow.

"I have good news," he announced. "We have won success. With the glass I can see from those sand-hills a larger river coursing from northwest to southeast through the valley beyond. There can be no doubt that it is the Red River."

They cheered and cheered, and ate with fine appetites. It was a happy night. As Sergeant Meek said:

"Once there—and 'twon't be long—we can send back for Menaugh, and poor Sparks and Dougherty, and Baroney and Smith and the hosses; and we'll all be together again, ready for the march home."

The sand-hills were five miles wide, and looked to be about fifteen miles long. The river came down obliquely through the valley—which was indeed a broad bottom of prairie-land; so they cut across at an angle, and not until the second evening, after a day's march of twenty-four miles, did they reach the bank of the river itself, January 30.

It certainly was the Red River, issuing from the western mountains, and here turning more southwardly, in the middle of the valley.

The valley was a wonderland. It lay flat, with little snow, full fifty miles wide and in length almost farther than eye might say. The mountains in the west were bald, snowy and grim. The Great White Mountains on the east appeared to end opposite in a

huge, dazzling peak with three crests, but a lower range veered in, narrowing the valley in the south. Afar in the north, the valley was closed completely.

The bottoms were dotted with herds of deer, browsing on the thick dried grasses. Many smaller streams joined the big river.

" Aye, 'tis a hunters' paradise, this," sighed Free-gift Stout. " We're in a land o' plenty. We can send back word that'll gladden the hearts of the boys behind."

The lieutenant had decided to make a fortified camp, so as to have protection from the Indians and perhaps from the Spanish while the men behind were being sent for and boats were being built. He intended to descend the Red River by boat and horse, both.

There was no timber at this spot. Some appeared lower along the river. They marched for it—eighteen miles. The larger trees were across the river; therefore the lieutenant led across, also, by way of the ice and several islands. Then they came to another river, that looked like a fork, entering from the west. About five miles from its mouth the lieutenant found a good place. The fort should be here.

It was a small piece of level bottom, grown to cottonwood trees on the north side of this west fork.

The fork was all open water, about thirty paces wide. Opposite, on the south side, there was a high, partly bare hill, out of gunshot.

The next morning, which was February 1, the lieutenant staked a plan of the fort, on the ground. Axes rang, spades scraped, picks thudded. As soon as the fort was far enough along so that it would stand an attack, a party should be sent back across the Great Snowy Mountains to get the other men and the horses.

"But what I'd like to know, is, what are we doin' on this side the main river?" queried Corporal Jerry, that night.

"To get at the big trees, and because 'tis the proper place for the fort," answered Sergeant Meek.

"Yes, maybe. But bein' as this is the Red River, we're on the Spanish side, ain't we? From all I hear, the Red River's the dividin' line betwixt the United States an' Mexico, an' we're across it into Mexican territory."

"That's not for you or me to say, my boy," Sergeant Meek retorted. "The cap'n has his orders, you can bet, and all we need do is to foller him. But sure, this is a fork, at the head-waters, and we're on the north side the fork. In a bit more we'll be starting on down, like as not keeping safe to our own

side again. And meanwhile if the Spanish tackle us here, all the worse for 'em. Not the whole Spanish army could budge us from this fort when it's done. I wouldn't mind having a dust with 'em, for a change from shooting buff'lo and deer."

"You're right. A dust at real fightin' would serve to pass the time, sergeant," the others cried. "Didn't we foller 'em, an' didn't they lead us wrong?"

"Or else we led ourselves wrong, mistaking Injun trail for white man trail. At any rate, here we are; and as soon as the ice breaks—which won't be long—we'll all be marching on, for home."

The fort was to be a strong one. Lieutenant Pike, who took great pride in it, explained the scheme, himself, to Stub.

"Thirty-six feet square, inside, fronting upon the river, where the current is too deep to ford. Bastions (which were small block-houses) at the two rear corners, to cover the walls on three sides. The walls, six feet up, of large cottonwood logs two feet through. Smaller logs to be laid for another six feet. A ditch will be dug all around, inside, and sloped off toward the walls, for pickets to rest in. The pickets will be sharpened and will slant two and one-half feet over the top of the walls, like a

fringe, so that nobody can climb in. All around, outside, there will be a deep ditch four feet wide, and filled with water. This is called a moat. We will cut a row of loopholes in the walls, eight feet up; the men will stand upon platforms, to shoot through. Our only entrance will be a hole, about the size of a man's body, low down, on the river side; and to use it, everybody will have to crawl in or out on his stomach, and cross the big ditch by means of a plank. There will be no roof; this is what is called a stockade. But the men doubtless will construct shelters of brush."

"You'll be a soldier yet," the doctor laughed, to Stub, overhearing the explanation.

"Entrenched here we need have no fear of one hundred Spanish troops," the lieutenant remarked. "We could easily stand them off for a day or two; then by a sally at night either disperse them, or make our escape in the darkness, before our supplies were exhausted."

"And Indians?"

"They would be less dangerous, unless they sent word to Santa Fe in the south. We would endeavor to treat with them, which is one of the purposes of the expedition."

Jake Carter and Alex Roy were not able to do

much, on account of tender feet. The other men worked hard, building the stockade around the American flag that had been planted on a pole, in the center. The lieutenant and Doctor Robinson hunted and explored. Stub frequently went with them, to help bring in the meat.

Once they discovered a group of springs, at the base of the hill south of the fork and opposite the stockade. These were warm springs, and strangely colored, brown and yellow. Their warm water was what kept the fork open, clear to the main river and for some distance down below the mouth of the fork.

They discovered also a well-traveled trail up along an eastern branch of the main river, not far above the western fork. It was a horse trail. Camps beside it showed that soldiers—probably Spanish—had used it. So the Spanish came in here.

The lieutenant and the doctor talked considerably of Santa Fe, the capital of New Mexico. It lay somewhere south. The lieutenant was anxious to know more about it, so as to make report upon it to the United States government. He could not leave the stockade, himself, but the doctor arranged to go.

Evidently this had been the plan for some time.

A trader by the name of William Morrison, in the United States, had sent goods there, three years ago, in charge of another man named Baptiste Lalande, to be sold. But Lalande had never come back with the money. Doctor Robinson had agreed with William Morrison to visit Santa Fe, if near there, and collect the money. This would be an excuse for spying around.

At the end of the first week, when the stockade was partially finished, the doctor left for Santa Fe. He set out westward, up the south bank of the fork (which was the wrong direction, although none of them knew it), and promised to return with his report in a week or ten days.

The men were not so certain about this. Sergeant Meek wagged his grizzled head dubiously.

"Not to criticize a superior officer, but strikes me it's a risky move. The doctor's pure grit, all right enough, to head alone through a country full o' Injun sign and Spanish sign to boot, and he's like to run his foot into a wolf trap. For if he gets there, them Spanish will be curyus to know where he come from; and what's to prevent their back-trailing him? Oh, well; there's something afoot that we don't understand. Our duty's to obey orders, and if the lieutenant says for us all to go to Santy Fee,

go we will. But we'll not go there by any orders o' the Spanish."

This evening Corporal Jerry Jackson was started out, to get John Sparks and Tom Dougherty, if he could, and also Hugh Menaugh, on the other side of the mountains. He took with him Freegift Stout, William Gordon, John Brown and John Mountjoy.

That left in the stockade only the lieutenant, Sergeant Meek, Terry Miller, Jake Carter and Alex Roy (whose feet had been badly frozen), and Stub. They missed the doctor, and Corporal Jerry's squad, but could get along for a few days.

This was February 7. No word might be expected from the doctor or Corporal Jerry for at least a week. Nothing especial happened during the week. The men and Stub kept on laboring at the stockade, the lieutenant read in a French book a great deal, or hunted for deer, taking Stub as companion.

By the sixteenth the walls of the stockade were about done, and the inside ditch, for the pickets, was being pecked out—a slow job in the frozen earth. Nine days had passed, and still there was no sign from the doctor or Corporal Jerry. This morning the lieutenant and Stub went out hunting again, down the main river. The lieutenant carried his favorite musket—the one whose grip had been

mended. Stub wore a pistol, the mate to Hugh Menaugh's, borrowed from the lieutenant.

They had tramped about six miles, had just wounded a deer and were trailing it, when the lieutenant suddenly exclaimed:

"Halt. Be quiet. Somebody's coming."

Two strangers, horseback, were topping a rise, half a mile before and a little on the right or west.

XVIII

VISITORS FROM THE SOUTH

"Not wild Indians; Spanish, rather," mused the lieutenant, as, standing motionless, he and Stub gazed. "Hah! They may be videttes (scouts) from a large party, or they may be hunters like ourselves. We'll turn back, my boy; not from fear but to avoid trouble if possible."

So they turned back, in the direction of the stockade. Glancing behind, Stub saw the two horsemen descending the hill at a gallop.

"They're coming, lieutenant. They've seen us."

"The sound of our gun no doubt attracted them first. They seem to be alone. Very well. They must not be permitted to think that we're afraid of them. Should they persist in coming on, we'll face them."

The two horsemen did come on, flourishing their lances as if in a charge. They were closing the gap rapidly—were within gunshot, when the lieutenant barked the brisk order:

"Now! Face about! We'll show them the muzzles of our guns."

They turned, and leveled musket and pistol. The two horsemen instantly pulled their mounts short, whirled, and bending low scudded away. In a short distance they halted, and sat waiting.

"We'll advance on them," quoth the lieutenant.

But the first few steps sent the pair scurrying in retreat again.

"All right," said the lieutenant. "They respect our weapons and see we do not fear theirs. Maybe they'll let us take our way."

However, when he and Stub proceeded on the trail for the stockade, on came the two horsemen in another charge. The lieutenant ordered a face-about—and away the two scampered, as before. This game was repeated several times. The stockade was not in sight, and the lieutenant was growing angry.

"We'll make an end to this, Stub." His face had flushed. "I do not propose to be badgered. It is beneath the dignity of an American officer and soldier to be toyed with in such child's play. Pay no further attention to them until we round that shoulder yonder. Then we'll slip into a ravine there and see if we can't lure them to close quarters that will bring them to account."

It was back-tickling work, to trudge on, never turning, with those lances threatening, closer and

closer, behind. But the lieutenant gave no sign—until, when around the shoulder and for a moment out of sight by the pursuit, he sprang aside.

"Quick, now!"

They dived for cover and found it in a heap of large, brush-screened rocks. They waited, peering and listening. Pretty soon they might hear the hoofs of the horses. The two riders cantered into sight. They were quite near. One was black-bearded—wore a large ribboned hat and blue and red coat and leathern leggins, the same as Lieutenant Melgares' soldiers had worn. He was a Spanish dragoon. He carried a lance, a shield and short muskatoon or escopeta hung at his saddle.

The other was dark, without whiskers: an Indian. He wore a blue cotton shirt and leggins wrapped in white from moccasins to knees. His hair fell in two braids. He, also, carried a lance and shield.

They saw nobody ahead of them, and began to move cautiously, craning, and checking their horses. Little by little they came on. Now they were within forty paces.

"This will do," the lieutenant whispered. "We have them. Lay down your pistol and stand up so they can see you're unarmed. Then walk out.

I'll follow and cover them. If they show sign of harm, I'll fire upon them instantly."

Stub bravely stood into full view and spread his empty hands. He was not afraid; not while Lieutenant Pike was backing him.

The two horsemen were completely surprised. They reined in and sat poised and gawking, on the verge of flight. But the lieutenant's gun muzzle held them fast, while Stub walked toward them, his hand up in the peace sign. The lieutenant called:

"Amigos (Friends)! Americanos (Americans)!" And he must have beckoned, for the two timidly edged forward, ready to run or to fight. Evidently they would rather run.

The lieutenant advanced also, and joined Stub.

"Take your pistol. Here it is. We'll talk with them. Do you know Spanish?"

"I've forgotten," Stub stammered.

"We'll manage with signs and the few words we do know. At the same time we must stand prepared to fire."

"Where are you from?" he queried sharply, in French.

The dragoon seemed to understand.

"From Santa Fe, señor."

"How far is Santa Fe?"

"Three days as we come, señor."

"What are you doing here?"

"We hunt."

They got off their horses, and led them in nearer; then they smiled friendly, and sat down and rolled themselves smokes. The lieutenant and Stub warily sat down, opposite. It was a little council. Stub eyed the Indian. He was a tame Indian—one of the house-building Indians from the south: a Pueblo.

"What do you hunt?" asked Lieutenant Pike.

"Game, señor. Do you hunt, also?"

"We travel down the Red River, to the American fort of Natchitoches."

"Another stranger has arrived, in Santa Fe. His name is Robinson. He is an American. The governor received him well. He comes from your party?"

"There is no such man in my party," the lieutenant answered; which was true, now.

Presently he arose. It was difficult talking by signs and short words.

"A Dios, señores. A pleasant journey to you."

"One moment, señor," begged the dragoon. "Where is your camp?"

"It is far; we have several camps. So good-by."

He and Stub started on. But the dragoon and the Indian mounted their horses and followed. They were determined to find the camp.

"They are spies," said the lieutenant. "We cannot get rid of them without trouble, and I have orders to avoid trouble. We shall have to take them in."

So he and Stub waited, and it was just as well, for soon the regular trail up river to the stockade was reached; the two horsemen struck into it, and forged ahead, peering eagerly. The trail crossed the fork above the stockade—and the first thing the two horsemen knew they were stopped in short order by Alex Roy who was posted as sentinel.

That astonished them again. They could just glimpse the stockade, they heard Alex challenge them, and saw his gun—and ducking and dodging they raced back, to the lieutenant.

"Do not fear. Come," he spoke.

He led them on; they left their horses outside, and, still frightened, followed him and Stub through an opening in the stockade, which was being used until the ditch and the hole were ready.

They stayed all that day. The men had orders to watch them, but not to talk with them. They stared about as much as they could. They asked several times where the Americans' horses were, and how many men the lieutenant had. Lieutenant Pike said that these were only a part of his men, and that he had marched without horses, through the

snow. He was going down the Red River, holding councils with the Indians on the borders of the United States. If the governor at Santa Fe would send somebody who spoke good French or English, he would explain everything.

The dragoon and the Pueblo did not believe; and when they rode away in the morning they were as suspicious as ever. They said they would be in Santa Fe in two days with the lieutenant's message to the governor, whose name was Don Joaquin del Real Alencaster. The lieutenant had given them a few presents, which appeared to please them. The Pueblo gave the lieutenant some deer meat, part of a goose, a sack of meal and pieces of flat, hard-baked bread.

Everybody was glad to see them go, but——

"It's an ill wind that brought 'em," Sergeant Meek remarked. "Not blaming him or the cap'n, the doctor did it. To be sure the Spanish would set out to s'arch the country. Unless I'm mistaken, we'll see more of 'em."

The lieutenant thought the same. He ordered that the work of finishing the stockade be rushed, and even lent a hand himself. He had no idea of leaving until Hugh, and John Sparks and Tom, across the mountains, and Baroney and Pat

Smith, on the Arkansaw with the horses, had been brought in.

It was high time that Corporal Jerry and party turned up. They had been gone a long while, and were needed. Five men and a boy were a small garrison. This evening Corporal Jerry, with John Brown, William Gordon and John Mountjoy, did arrive. After he had reported to the lieutenant, he told his story to the rest of them.

"Yes, we found Hugh, but we had to cross in snow middle deep, to do it. He's comin' on with Freegift. They'll be down to-morrow. We went back to Sparks an' Dougherty, too."

"How are they?"

"Bad off. Ah, boys, 'twould melt your hearts to see 'em. They sheer wept when we hailed 'em. They've got food enough yet, even after the near two months; but they can scarce walk a step. Their feet are gone, an' they've hardly a finger between 'em. So we couldn't move 'em; not through the snow of the passes. We did what we could to cheer 'em up, but when we left they acted like they never expected to see us again. Yes; an' they sent over bones from their feet, for the cap'n, an' made me promise to give 'em to him as a token an' to beg him, by all that's sacred, not to let the two of 'em die like beasts, alone in the wilds. When I gave

him the bones an' told him, he turned white an' his eyes filled up. 'They should know me better than that,' said he. 'Never would I abandon them. To restore them to their homes and their country again I'd carry the end of a litter, myself, through snow and mountains for months.'"

"He'd do it," asserted Sergeant Meek. "And so would any of us. Bones from their feet, is it? Who but a soldier would lose the smallest joint for such a pittance of pay, even to serve his country? Surely the Government won't lose sight o' men like poor John and Tom."

The lieutenant took prompt measures. The news from the back trail had affected him sorely. This same evening he approached the men who were sitting around the fire. They sprang up, to attention.

"You have heard of the condition of Sparks and Dougherty," he addressed. "They must be brought in at once, with all possible speed." He paused, as if planning.

Sergeant Meek saluted.

"One man and myself will take the trip, sir, with your permission. Jest give us the word, sir."

"I'm with you, sergeant," blurted Terry Miller.

"None better," accepted the sergeant. "We'll go on back to the Arkansaw, cap'n, for the hosses.

And with the hosses we'll pick up John and Tom, and if they can't ride we'll sling 'em in litters."

Lieutenant Pike colored with pleasure.

"That is handsome of you, sergeant; and of you, Miller. You will march as soon as Stout and Menaugh get in, and we can make the preparations. Your volunteering for a journey afoot of almost two hundred miles over two ranges of mountains waist deep in snow, at the risk of encountering savages, and soldiers of a nation that may not be friendly, is worthy of the uniform that you have worn."

"By your leave, sir, there are some others who'd be proud to share the honor with the sergeant and Terry," spoke up Jake Carter, crippled though he was. "I'll answer for my feet, sir. They'll carry me, once I limber 'em up."

"Two will be enough. I'm sorry that I can't spare more, my man. I see that if you all had your way you'd leave me without a garrison."

Sergeant Meek and Terry felt highly tickled at having got in ahead of the rest.

The next morning Hugh and Freegift arrived all right. The other two were to start early on the morrow. Ten pounds of deer meat apiece was all that might be spared them; they said it was plenty—

they had to travel light, anyway, and would hunt as they went.

The lieutenant, with Corporal Jackson, John Mountjoy and William Gordon and Stub, walked with them for six miles, so that they might be shown a better pass for the horses, than the one used by the corporal. Jerry had reported that his pass was four feet deep with snow, during three days' travel.

After the sergeant and Terry had trudged on, the others killed a deer; Stub and Corporal Jerry were sent back with it, to the stockade, but the lieutenant took John and Bill with him, on a farther scout, down the east side of the main river.

They were gone all day and the night. When they came in, the next afternoon, they said that they had discovered fresh signs of men and horses, south. The lieutenant called the garrison together and issued strict orders. The two spies had left five days ago; and if Santa Fe was only two days' march distant, soldiers from there were likely to appear at any moment now.

"We must especially watch out for Indians, my lads," he directed. "The tribes hereabouts are doubtless under the influence of the Spanish government in New Mexico. When any strangers are sighted loitering about or passing, you are to retire unobserved, if possible. If they see you, you are

not to run, however, nor permit them to approach you with the idea of disarming you or taking you prisoner. Should you be unable to evade them, you are to guard your liberty and bring them to the fort, where I will attend to them."

A sentry was posted all day on the top of a hill at the edge of the stockade prairie, from where he had a fine view up and down the fork and along the main river also. During the nights another sentry kept watch from one of the bastions or little block-houses on the land-side corners of the stockade.

The stockade had been enclosed by the log walls, the pickets had been planted, and within a day or two the outside ditch would be ready for the water.

On February 24 the lieutenant took Stub again upon another scout and hunt. The two spies had been gone seven days, and nothing had been heard from them. He was getting nervous while waiting for the sergeant and Terry to return with the horses, Baroney, Pat, and John and Tom. Meat was low; the men themselves had been too busy to hunt—but the water was in the ditch and everything was snug and shipshape.

He and Stub were out two days, scouting eastward, to examine the traveled road along which the Spanish might come. They made a circle and arrived

" home," lugging the meat of three deer, about nine o'clock at night.

Corporal Jerry greeted them, after the challenge of Freegift Stout, who was the guard in the bastion.

" We were beginnin' to be scared for you, sir," he said. " We didn't know but what the Injuns or the Spanish had taken you."

" All quiet here, corporal? "

" Yes, sir; all quiet."

" That's good. We'd have been back sooner, only we hunted farther than we intended, and had heavy loads to pack in. Now if the other men with the horses return in safety, we may all march on unmolested, through American territory."

But in the morning, while they were at breakfast, the musket of John Brown, on the hill, sounded —" Boom! " It was a signal: " Strangers in sight." Corporal Jerry dropped his knife and bolted into a bastion, to look. Everybody paused, to learn the news.

Back ran Corporal Jerry, to the lieutenant, who was standing at the entrance to his brush lean-to, buckling on his sword.

" Two men are crossin' the prairie for the fort, sir. Menaugh (Hugh was the sentinel pacing outside) is about to stop 'em."

"See what they have to say. And if there are no more, admit them," ordered the lieutenant.

Away ran Corporal Jerry, for already Hugh was calling for the corporal of the guard, while holding off the two strangers.

XIX

IN THE HANDS OF THE SPANIARDS

In a few minutes the two strangers crawled through the hole. They were clad in blanket-coats and deer-hide trousers and fur caps; looked like French traders—and Frenchmen they proved to be, for the lieutenant called to them, in French, "Come here," and he and they talked together in that language.

Stub might catch only a word now and then; the men listened, puzzled, prepared to grasp their stacked guns.

The lieutenant finished the conversation. The Frenchmen bowed politely again, he saluted them and spoke to his party.

"These are two Frenchmen from Santa Fe, lads," he said. "They inform me that the governor of New Mexico is fearful of an attack upon us by the Utah Indians, and has sent a detachment of fifty dragoons for our protection. The detachment is within two days' march of us. You know your duty. I rely upon you to act in a manner that will reflect credit upon our Country."

Scarcely had he spoken when they all heard the sentinels outside hailing loudly, with "Halt!

Who comes there? Corp'ral of the guar-rd! Post Number One!"

Out dived Corporal Jerry, once more.

"To arms! Man the works, men!" the lieutenant rapped.

They grabbed guns and hustled for the platforms under the loopholes. There were more loopholes than men. Peeping through his, Stub might see out into the prairie before the stockade. From up the fork a large body of mounted soldiers had ridden into the edge of the clearing. John Brown, who had come in from his hill, and Hugh Menaugh were holding them back, Corporal Jerry was hastening to the scene.

The lieutenant also had seen.

"That is the company?" he demanded, of the two Frenchmen.

"Oui, Monsieur Lieutenant."

"Tell the commander with my compliments to leave his men in the woods where he now is, and I will meet him on the prairie before the fort."

"Oui, oui."

Out went the two Frenchmen.

"They look like a hundred," remarked Jake Carter. "We're only eight, and an officer an' a boy. But what's the difference?"

"Sure, in case of a dust, Meek and Terry an'

the rest of 'em will be sorry to miss it" replied soldier Mountjoy.

" Hooray for a brush, if that's the word. We're equal to it, no matter how many they send ag'in us."

The men were keen for a fight. 'Twas a great thing, thought Stub, to be an American. But the Spanish soldiers, halted at the edge of the prairie within short gunshot, looked strong. About fifty, in one body, were the dragoons; fifty appeared to be a mixture—a part Indians. But all were well armed with short muskets, pistols, swords, lances and shields—some in one style, some in another.

The lieutenant had left and was striding into the prairie, to meet two Spanish officers. He had taken only his sword, by his side. That would show his rank, for his clothes certainly did not Nevertheless, the two Spanish officers, all in their heavy crimson cloaks, and decorated hats, and long boots, did not look any more gallant than he in his ragged blanket-coat, torn trousers, moccasins and fur-lined be-draggled makeshift cap.

The three saluted, and talked for a short time. Beyond, at the timber, the horses pawed and snorted. Corporal Jerry and the two sentries stayed, vigilant. At the loopholes, inside the stockade, the five men and Stub peered, ready.

Presently one of the Spanish officers shouted a

command to the soldiers; they relaxed, at ease—some dismounted, to stretch their legs; he and the other officer followed Lieutenant Pike to the stockade.

"No fight, hey?" uttered Alex Roy.

"But no surrender, either, you can bet," grunted Freegift. "The cap'n likely has something up his sleeve."

The lieutenant entered, through the hole; the two Spanish officers crawled in after—and an odd sight they made as they straightened up, to stare about them curiously. It was plain that they were much astonished by the completeness of the trap.

The lieutenant led the two officers to his brush shelter. Stub heard his own name called—the lieutenant beckoned to him. So he jumped down and went over.

"These two gentlemen of the Spanish army of New Mexico are to be my guests at breakfast, boy," said the lieutenant. "I wish you to serve us. Bring out the best we have. The provisions given me by the Indian we met can now be put to good use."

It was fortunate indeed that the lieutenant had saved the meal, goose and pieces of bread particularly. They were a treat—although doubtless the Spanish soldiers were used to even that fare. At any rate, most of the stuff soon disappeared, washed down by water, after the table had been set, so to speak.

The lieutenant and his guests chatted in French. When they had finished eating, and the two Spanish officers had wiped their moustaches with fine white handkerchiefs, the lieutenant said, crisply:

"Have I the pleasure to understand that this is a friendly call upon me by his Majesty's troops, at the instance of the New Mexico government?"

The elder officer coughed. He answered politely:

"Señor, the Governor of New Mexico, being informed that you have missed your route, has ordered me to offer you in his name mules, horses, money, or whatever you may need, for the purpose of conducting you to the head of the Red River. From Santa Fe that is eight days' journey, before open to navigation. We have guides and know the routes."

"What! Missed my route, sir? Is not this the Red River?"

"No, señor. This is the Rio Grande del Norte, of New Mexico. The Red River is many leagues to the southeast."

The lieutenant flushed red. His thin hands clinched, and he gazed bewildered.

"Impossible. Why was I not told this by those two men ten days ago, and I would have withdrawn?"

The officer twirled his moustache and shrugged his shoulders.

"Quien sabe (Who knows), Señor Don Lieutenant? But I now have the honor to inform you, and am at your service."

The lieutenant recovered, and stepped outside a few paces.

"Stout!"

"Yes, sir."

"Lower the flag and roll it up. It will not be hoisted again without my orders."

"Sir?" Freegift stammered. And——

"Oh, no, sir! Not that! Not haul down the flag! Let us keep it flyin', sir. We can do it."

Those were the cries. The lieutenant lifted his hand.

"Silence. I thank you, men. This is not surrender. I have no thought of surrender. But we are not upon the Red River. We are upon the Rio del Norte, in Mexican territory, and in courtesy to that government I am lowering the flag of my own free-will. By building this stockade we have unwittingly trespassed." *

* All the Rio Grande River which flows southward through south central Colorado into New Mexico was Spanish territory. The Lieutenant Pike party had crossed the Sangre de Cristo Range and had struck the Rio Grande near present Alamosa in the southern half of Colorado's great San Luis Park or Valley. The largest of the White Mountains, on the east, was Sierra Blanca ("White Mountain" today), altitude 14,390 feet, ranking third among the peaks of the Rockies.

The men muttered; the two visiting officers sat uneasy; but Freegift lowered the flag, caught it in his arms, and with rather a black glance at the red cloaks folded it carefully.

"By thunder, when we raise it ag'in, it'll stay," he grumbled, as he went to stow it away.

"His Excellency Governor Alencaster requests the pleasure of a talk with you at Santa Fe, señor," said the elder officer, with a smile, to the lieutenant. "He is desirous of entertaining you and learning the story of your journey. For your accommodation he has provided me with one hundred animals, to carry your baggage."

"I thank His Excellency, but it is impossible for me to accept the invitation," replied Lieutenant Pike, seating himself again. "I can only send him my apologies for trespassing, by mistake, upon his domain. I will wait here merely until the return of my sergeant and the remainder of my company, and then withdraw at once to American soil. My orders forbid me entering into Spanish territory."

From the camp at the river the Pike men had travelled south, and built their stockade about five miles up the Conejos (Rabbits) River, which enters the Rio Grande from the west. Did he know this to be the Rio Grande del Norte, or did he really think it to be the Red River? Why did he stop in what was certainly Spanish territory? Did he wish to be captured? Or did he only take a chance? Historians have puzzled over this ever since.

"His Excellency will be much distressed not to see you, señor," the officer insisted. "I must beg of you to take advantage of our escort. Otherwise I cannot answer for your safety."

At this, the lieutenant straightened, and his eyes flashed.

"My safety will be attended to, sir. I shall not move until the safety of my sergeant and party, some of whom may be suffering, is assured also. Do I understand that your intent is to use force to convey me to the governor?

The officer spread his hands and shook his head.

"No, no, señor! Not in the least. But it is necessary that for the information of the governor-general the governor of New Mexico should receive from you personally an explanation of your presence within his frontier, that he may send in the proper report. If you wish to go with us now, very well; or if you wish to wait for the return of your other party, very well. But in that case we shall be obliged to obtain more provisions from Santa Fe, and dispatch a small number for that purpose." Even Stub, who had been listening agog, and catching most of the words, knew that this meant reinforcements. "If you decide to march with us now," the officer added, "I will leave here an Indian who speaks English, and a part of my dragoons, to greet your

sergeant and escort him and his men to join you at Santa Fe."

The lieutenant bit his lip and fidgeted. He was of two minds; but one thing was certain: he could not get rid of these Spanish without a big fight. And the worst of that would be, that he was an invader and had broken the law.

He did not hesitate long.

"I shall not yield to force, sir," he said. "We are American soldiers and prepared to defend ourselves, as you have seen. However, in consideration of your courteous attitude I am disposed to go with your escort to His Excellency, and give him the explanation that is due from one friendly nation to another. But I must leave two of my men here, to receive the sergeant and reassure him; otherwise, I promise you, he will not come on without a fight, except by direct orders from me."

"That is agreed, señor," bowed the officer. "And we may consider the matter very happily settled. You have my respectful thanks."

The lieutenant's eyes fell upon Stub.

"Tell Stout to send Corporal Jackson in to me." He spoke to the Spanish officer. "I will instruct my men to permit yours to approach, and would suggest that you inform your company we are willing to receive them as friends, if their actions so warrant."

"Thanks, señor."

Stub sought Freegift Stout.

"The lieutenant says for you to tell Jerry to come in."

Freegift climbed down.

"What's it all about? Say! Is it true we're not on the Red River yet, but on what they call the Rio del Norte? Sure, that's not so."

"It's what they say. The lieutenant believes it. And we're going to Santa Fe."

"For what?"

"The governor wants to talk with him."

"But not without a dust! Oh, no, now! Leave these good works, an' go without a dust?"

Stub nodded soberly. Freegift dared not delay longer. He went off muttering. The other men also murmured. The plan was not to their liking.

Freegift returned with Corporal Jerry. The men trooped after him, to the lieutenant. Freegift acted as speaker. He saluted——

"What's this? Why have you left your posts?" the lieutenant demanded.

"Please, cap'n. Beggin your pardon, sir—but 'tain't true, is it, that were layin' down our arms an' givin' up to them Spanish, to march out, an' no fight offered? Sure, sir, we're only eight and a boy; but we're behind good walls, an' you're the proper

kind of an officer, an' 'twould be no great job at all to hold them fellers off till we could slip away with colors flyin'. You can't trust them fellers, sir. An' if you'll only give us the orders, sir, we'll hand out a dose of Yankee Doodle; eh, boys?"

"Yes, sir! We're ready for a dust, cap'n, sir. We'd rather trust to our muskets than to those Spanish. We're not afeared of 'em."

"That will do," Lieutenant Pike answered, but not unkindly. "You're brave lads. I know I can depend on you—and with you I'd like to test our defences at which you've worked so faithfully. But we are marching of our own free will, and shall retain our arms. My orders are to avoid a conflict with the Mexican forces, unless attacked. Since we are unfortunately in Spanish territory, it will be better if we proceed boldly to the New Mexican capital, at the invitation of the governor, rather than put ourselves in the wrong by resistance."

"Yes, sir. If you say so, sir," they replied, with glum faces.

"Corporal, you may draw the sentries in," continued the lieutenant. "The Spanish soldiers are to be allowed to move freely outside of the works. Some of the men may meet them, to treat them civilly, for I wish no sign of suspicion to be shown."

The two Spanish officers had gone to their troops.

A great cheering arose, from that direction, as if the soldiery had been told that there would be no fighting, and were heartily glad.

The Spanish flocked forward, into the prairie in front of the stockade. Freegift and several of the other men, and Stub, did sally out, curious to inspect their new friends. The Spanish soldiers were regular dragoons, fifty; and mounted militia, fifty—a mixture, these, of Spaniards and Mexicans and Indians.

And they were kind and friendly, indeed. They brought food and blankets and insisted that the Americans accept. Freegift himself finally admitted:

"Well, I'd still prefer a little dust, for the honor of the army an' a proof that a half-froze American is as good a man as a dozen foreigners; but I don't deny they're treatin' us mighty handsome, the same as brothers-at-arms. The colors of 'em are a bit peculiar, yet their hearts seem white."

Toward noon Corporal Jerry sought out all the garrison and called them together, inside.

"Mountjoy, you an' I are to stay here, with some of the Spanish, an' a letter from the cap'n to hand to the sergeant when he comes. The rest of you are to get ready to march at once. So good luck to you—an' we'll see you later."

"That you will," they answered. "And be sure you fetch Sparks and Dougherty. They're the ones who need all these fine fixin's."

Horses were provided, as promised by the Spanish officer. Riding comfortably on these, and escorted by fifty of the dragoons and militia and the two officers (whose names were Lieutenant Don Ignatio Saltelo and Lieutenant Don Bartholomew Fernandez), after dinner they rode twelve miles westward up the fork to the Spanish camp. Now they numbered only Lieutenant Pike, Privates Free-gift Stout, Alex Roy, Hugh Menaugh, William Gordon, Jacob Carter, John Brown, and Jack Pursley otherwise Stub. Corporal Jerry Jackson and Private John Mountjoy remained at the stockade, with the other fifty Spanish soldiers, to wait for Sergeant Meek, and Private Terry Miller, who were bringing in, across the mountains, John Sparks and Tom Dougherty (lacking feet and fingers), Baroney Vasquez and interpreter, Pat Smith, and the horses.

Truly, the little American column had become much scattered.

"Jinks! I'd like to be there at the reception and see the sergeant's face," Alex Roy chuckled. "'Specially when he learns we ain't been on the Red River at all!"

"It may seem like a joke, but it's a rough one," quoth William Gordon. "A look at the cap'n's face is enough for me. To think, after all these months he's never got anywhere. 'Twill be a great report that he'll have to turn in, 'less he aims to l'arn something of the Spanish country. At any rate, we've hauled down our flag, and given up our fort and I'm sorry for him. He deserved better."

XX

STUB REACHES END O' TRAIL

"SANTA FE! The city of Santa Fe! Behold!"

Those were the cries adown the delighted column. Here they were, at last; but this was the evening of the fifth day since leaving the camp, and the distance was more than one hundred and sixty miles. The two spies, who had said that Santa Fe was only two days' journey from the stockade, had lied.

The first stage of the trip had been very cold, in deep snow. Then, on the third day, or March 1, they had emerged into a country of warmth and grass and buds, at the first of the Mexican settlements—a little town named Aqua Caliente or Warm Springs. Hooray!

They all, the Americans, viewed it curiously. The houses were low and one-story, of yellowish mud, with flat roofs; grouped close together so that they made an open square in the middle of the town and their rears formed a bare wall on the four sides.

"'Tis like a big brick-kiln, by jinks," remarked Freegift. "Now I wonder do they build this way for fear o' the Injuns?"

The people here numbered about five hundred—mainly Indians themselves, but tame Indians, Pueblos who lived in houses, with a mingling of Mexican blood. From the house-tops they welcomed the column; and thronging to meet it they brought out food and other gifts for the strangers. That night there was a dance, with the Americans as guests of honor.

"If this is the way they treat prisoners," the men grinned, "sure, though some of us can't shake our feet yet, we're agreeable to the good intentions."

The same treatment had occurred all the way down along the Rio Grande del Norte, through a succession of the flat mud villages. There had been feasting, dancing, and at every stop the old women and old men had taken the Americans into the houses and dressed their frozen feet.

"This feet-washin' and food-givin' makes a feller think on Bible times," William Gordon asserted. "The pity is, that we didn't ketch up with that Spanish column that was lookin' for us and gone right home with 'em for a friendly visit. They'd likely have put us on the Red River and have saved us our trouble."

"Well, we ain't turned loose yet, remember," counseled Hugh Menaugh. "From what I l'arn, the Melgares column didn't aim to entertain us with

anything more'n a fight. But now we're nicely done, without fightin'."

"Yes, this here politeness may be only a little celebration," Alex mused. "It's cheap. For me, I'd prefer a dust or two, to keep us in trim."

There had been one bit of trouble, which had proved that the lieutenant, also, was not to be bamboozled. In the evening, at the village named San Juan, or St. John, the men and Stub were together in a large room assigned to them, when the lieutenant hastily entered. He had been dining at the priest's house, with Lieutenant Bartholomew; but now a stranger accompanied him—a small, dark, sharp-faced man.

The lieutenant seemed angry.

"Shut the door and bar it," he ordered, of John Brown. Then he turned on the stranger. "We will settle our matters here," he rapped, in French; and explained, to the men: "This fellow is a spy, from the governor. He has been dogging me and asking questions in poor English all the way from the priest's house. I have requested him to speak in his own language, which is French, but he understands English and would pretend that he is a prisoner to the Spanish—'like ourselves,' he alleges. I have informed him that we have committed no crime, are not prisoners, and fear nothing. We are

free Americans. As for you," he continued, to the man, roundly, "I know you to be only a miserable spy, hired by the governor in hopes that you will win my sympathy and get me to betray secrets. I have nothing to reveal. But it is in my power to punish such scoundrels as you"—here the lieutenant drew his sword—"and if you now make the least resistance I will use the sabre that I have in my hand."

"Let us fix him, sir," cried Hugh, Freegift, and the others. "We'll pay him an' save the governor the trouble."

They crowded forward. The dark man's legs gave out under him and down he flopped, to his knees.

"No, señores! For the love of God don't kill me. I will confess all." He was so frightened that his stammering English might scarcely be understood. "His Excellency the governor ordered me to ask many questions. That is true. And it is true that I am no prisoner. I am a resident of Santa Fe, and well treated. The governor said that if I pretended hatred of the country you would be glad of my help. I see now that you are honest men."

"What is your name?" the lieutenant demanded.

"Baptiste Lelande, señor, at your service."

"You can be of no service to me save by getting out of my sight," retorted the lieutenant, scornfully,

and clapping his sword back into its sheath. "You are a thief, and doubtless depend upon the governor for your safety. Tell His Excellency that the next time he employs spies upon us he should choose those of more skill and sense, but that I question whether he can find any such, to do that kind of work. Now begone."

John Brown opened the door. The man scuttled out.

"My lads," spoke the lieutenant, when the door had been closed again, "this is the second time that I have been approached by spies, on the march. On the first occasion I assumed to yield, and contented the rascal by giving into his keeping a leaf or two copied from my journel—which in fact merely recounted the truth as to our number and our setting forth from the Missouri River. The fellow could not read, and is treasuring the paper, for the eyes of the governor. If I am to be plagued this way, I fear that my baggage or person may be searched, and my records obtained by our long toil be stolen. Accordingly I shall trust in you, knowing that you will not fail me. I have decided to distribute my important papers among you, that you may carry them on your persons, out of sight."

So he did.

"They'll be ready for you when you want em,

cap'n, sir," Freegift promised, as the men stowed the papers underneath their shirts. "If the Spanish want 'em, they'll have to take our skins at the same time."

"That they will," was the chorus.

"To the boy here I consign the most important article of all," pursued the lieutenant, "because he is the least likely to be molested. It is my journal of the whole trip. If that were lost, much of our labors would have been thrown away. I can rely on you to keep it safe, Stub?"

"Yes, sir." And Stub also stowed away his charge—a thin book with stained red covers, in which the lieutenant had so frequently written, at night.

"We will arrive at Santa Fe to-morrow, lads," the lieutenant had warned. "And if my baggage is subjected to a search by order of the governor, I shall feel safe regarding my papers."

Presently he left.

"Lalande, the nincompoop was, was he?" remarked Jake Carter. "Well, he got his come-uppments. But ain't he the same that the doctor was lookin' for—the sly one who skipped off with a trader's goods?"

"So what more could be expected, than dirty work, from the likes!" Hugh proposed.

The lieutenant fared so heartily at the priest's

house that this night he was ill. In the morning, which was that of March 3, they all had ridden on southward, led by him and by the pleasant Don Lieutenant Bartholomew. They had passed through several more villages, one resembling another; and in the sunset, after crossing a high mesa or flat table-land covered with cedars, at the edge they had emerged into view of Santa Fe, below.

"Santa Fe! La ciudad muy grande (The great city)! Mira (See)!"

Those were the urgent exclamations from the dragoons and militia.

"'Great city,' they say?" Hugh uttered, to Stub. "Huh! Faith, it looks like a fleet o' flatboats, left dry an' waitin' for a spring rise!"

It was larger than the other villages or towns, and lay along both flanks of a creek. There were two churches, one with two round-topped steeples; but all the other buildings were low and flat-roofed and ugly, ranged upon three or four narrow crooked streets. At this side of the town there appeared to be the usual square, surrounded by the mud buildings. Yes, the two-steepled church fronted upon it.

As they rode down from the mesa, by the road that they had been following, the town seemed to wake up. They could hear shouting, and might see

people running afoot and galloping horseback, making for the square.

A bevy of young men, gaily dressed, raced, ahorse, to meet the column. The whole town evidently knew that the Americans were coming. The square was filled with excited men, women and children, all chattering and staring.

Lieutenant Bartholomew cleared the way through them, and halted in front of a very long, low building, with a porch supported on a row of posts made of small logs, and facing the square, opposite the church. He swung off. The dragoons and militia kept the crowd back.

Lieutenant Pike, in his old clothes, swung off.

"Dismount!" he called. "We are to enter here, lads. Bear yourselves boldly. We are American soldiers, and have nothing to fear."

He strode on, firm and erect, following the guidance of Lieutenant Bartholomew.

"Keep together," Freegift cautioned; and the men pushed after, trying not to limp, and to carry their army muskets easily. Stub brought up the tail of the little procession. He, too, was an American, and proud of it, no matter how they all looked, without hats, in rags and moccasins, the hair of heads and faces long.

They entered the long-fronted building. The

doorway was a full four feet thick. The interior was gloomy, lighted by small deep-set windows with dirty panes. There was a series of square, low-ceilinged rooms—"'Tis like a dungeon, eh?" Freegift flung back—but the earth floors were strewn with the pelts of buffalo, bear, panther, what-not.

They were halted in a larger room, with barred windows and no outside door. Lieutenant Bartholomew bowed to Lieutenant Pike, and left. Against the walls there were several low couches, covered with furs and gay blankets, for seats. So they sat down, and the men stared about.

"Whereabouts in here are we, I wonder," John Brown proposed.

"Did ye see them strings o' tanned Injun ears hangin' acrost the front winders!" remarked Hugh Menaugh.

"Sure, we'd never find way out by ourselves," declared Alex Roy. "It's a crookeder trail than the one to the Red River."

The lieutenant briefly smiled; but he sat anxiously.

Lieutenant Bartholomew suddenly returned; close behind him a large, heavy-set, swarthy, hard-faced man, of sharp black eyes, and dressed in a much decorated uniform. Lieutenant Pike hastily arose, at attention; they all rose.

"His Excellency Don Joaquin del Real Alencaster, Governor of the Province of New Mexico," Lieutenant Bartholomew announced. "I have the honor to present Lieutenant Don Mungo-Meri-Paike, of the American army."

Lieutenant Pike bowed; the governor bowed, and spoke at once, in French.

"You command here?"

"Yes, sir." The lieutenant answered just as quickly.

"Do you speak French?"

"Yes, sir."

"You come to reconnoiter our country, do you?"

"I marched to reconnoiter our own," replied Lieutenant Pike.

"In what character are you?"

"In my proper character, sir: an officer of the United States army."

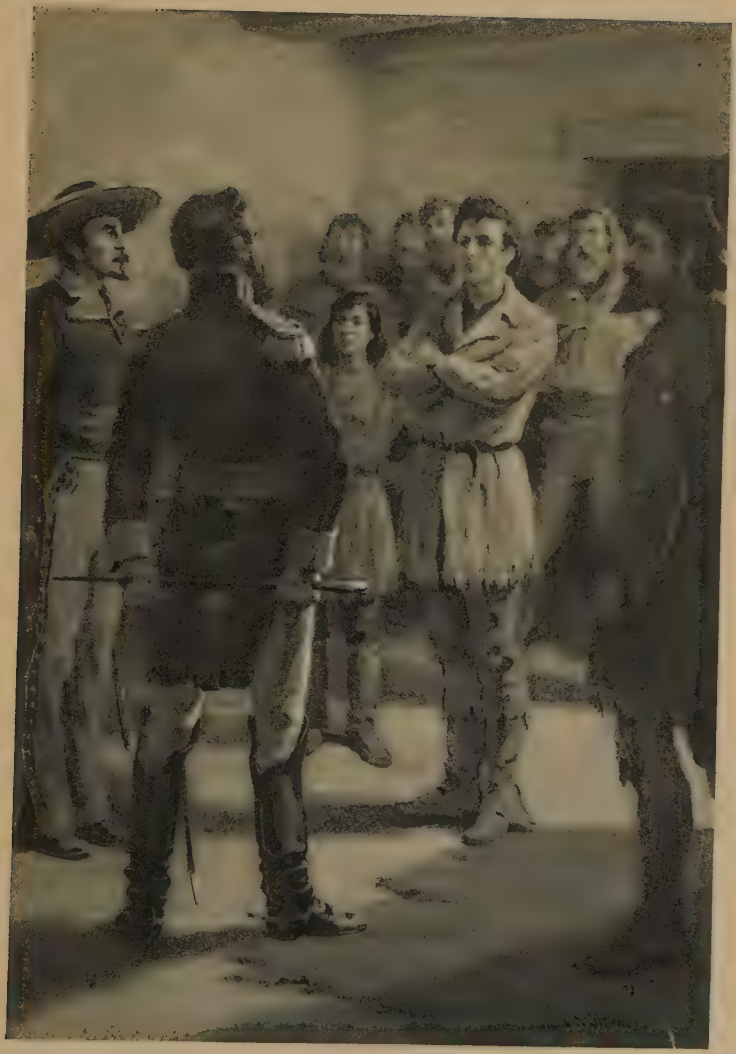
"And the man Robinson—is he attached to your party?"

"No." The governor's voice had been brusque, and the lieutenant was beginning to flush. But it was true that the doctor was only an independent volunteer.

"Do you know him?"

"Yes. He is from St. Louis."

"How many men have you?"



"IN MY PROPER CHARACTER, SIR: AN OFFICER OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY"

"I had fifteen." And this also was true, when counting the deserter Kennerman.

"And this Robinson makes sixteen?" insisted the governor.

"I have already told your Excellency that he does not belong to my party" the lieutenant retorted. "I shall answer no more enquiries on the subject."

"When did you leave St. Louis?"

"July 15."

"I think you marched in June."

"No, sir."

"Very well," snapped the governor. "Return with Don Bartholomew to his house, and come here again at seven o'clock and bring your papers with you."

He shortly bowed, whirled on his heels and left. The lieutenant bit his lips, striving to hold his temper. Lieutenant Bartholomew appeared distressed.

"A thousand apologies, Don Lieutenant," he proffered. "His Excellency is in bad humor; but never mind. You are to be my guest. Your men will be quartered in the barracks. Please follow me."

They filed out, through the rooms, into daylight again.

"A sergeant will show your men, señor. They are free to go where they please, in the city," said

Lieutenant Bartholomew. "My own house is at your service."

"Go with Lieutenant Bartholomew's sergeant, lads," Lieutenant Pike directed. "Guard your tongues and actions and remember your duty to your Government."

Beckoning with a flash of white teeth underneath his ferocious moustache the dragoon sergeant took them to the barracks. These were another long building on the right of the first building, fronting upon the west side of the square and protected by a wall with a court inside.

At a sign from the sergeant they stacked their muskets and hung their pistols, in the court. Then they were led in to supper.

"Sure, we're goin' to be comfortable," Freegift uttered, glancing around as they ate. "The food is mighty warmin'—what you call the seasonin'? Pepper, ain't it, same as we got, above? Yes."

"Did you hear what they call that other buildin', where we were took first?" asked Jake Carter, of Stub.

"The Palace of the Governors, the soldiers said."

"Palace!" Jake snorted. "It's more like the keep of a bomb-proof fort. I've dreamed of palaces, but never such a one. There's nothin' for a governor to be so high and uppish about."

"The cap'n gave him tit for tat, all right," asserted William Gordon. "We've got a verse or two of Yankee Doodle in us yet!"

They finished supper and shoved back their cowhide benches.

"We're to go where we plaze, ain't it?" queried Hugh. "So long as we keep bounds? Well, I'm for seein' the town whilst I can."

"We're with you, old hoss," they cried, and trooped into the court.

First thing, they found that their guns had vanished.

Freegift scratched his shaggy head.

"Now, a pretty trick. We're disarmed. They come it over us proper, I say."

Spanish soldiers were passing to and fro. Some stared, some laughed, but nobody offered an explanation or seemed to understand the questions.

"That wasn't in the bargain, was it?" Alex Roy demanded. "The cap'n 'll have a word or two of the right kind ready, when he learns. Anyhow, we'll soon find out whether we're prisoners as well. Come on."

The gate at the entrance to the court was open. The guard there did not stop them. They had scarcely stepped out, to the square, when loitering soldiers and civilians, chatting with women envel-

oped in black shawls, welcomed them in Spanish and beckoned to them, and acted eager to show them around.

" ' Buenas noches,' is it? ' Good evenin' to ye,' " spoke Freegift. " I expect there'll be no harm in loosenin' up a bit. So fare as you like, boys, an' have a care. I'm off. Who's with me? "

They trooped gaily away, escorted by their new Santa Fean friends. Stub stuck to Freegift, for a time; but every little while the men had to stop, and drink wine offered to them at the shops and even at the houses near by; so, tiring of this, he fell behind, to make the rounds on his own account and see what he chose to see.

He was crossing the bare, hard-baked square, or plaza as they called it, to take another look at the strings of Indian ears festooned on the front of the Governor's Palace, when through the gathering dusk somebody hailed him.

" Hi! Muchacho! Aqui! (Hi! Boy! Here!)"

It was Lieutenant Bartholomew. summoning him toward the barracks. The lieutenant met him.

" Habla Español (You speak Spanish)? "

" Very little," Stub answered.

" Bien (Good)." And the lieutenant continued eagerly. " Como se llama Ud. en Americano (What is your name in American)? "

"Me llamo Jack Pursley (My name is Jack Pursley), señor."

"Si, si! Bien! Muy bien! (Yes, yes! Good! Very good!)" exclaimed the lieutenant. "Ven conmigo, pues (Come with me, then)."

On he went, at such a pace that Stub, wondering, had hard work keeping up with him. They made a number of twists and turns through the crooked, darkened streets, and the lieutenant stopped before a door set in the mud wall of a house flush with the street itself. He opened, and entered—Stub on his heels. They passed down a narrow verandah, in a court, entered another door——

The room was lighted with two candles. It had no seats except a couple of blanket-covered couches against its wall; a colored picture or two of the saints hung on the bare walls. A man had sprung up. He was a tall, full-bearded man—an American even though his clothes were Spanish.

He gazed upon Stub; Stub gaped at him.

"It is the boy," panted Lieutenant Bartholomew. "Bien?"

"Jack!" shouted the man.

"My dad!" Stub blurted.

They charged each other, and hugged.

"Good! Good!" exclaimed the lieutenant, danc-

ing delighted. Several women rushed in, to peer and ask questions.

"Boy, boy!" uttered Jack's father, holding him off to look at him again. "I thought never to see you, after the Utes got you. They took you somewhere—I couldn't find out; and finally they fetched me down to Santa Fe, and here I've been near two years, carpentering."

"Couldn't you get away?"

"No. They won't let me. And now I'm mighty glad."

"Well, I'm here, too," laughed Stub. "And I guess I'll stay; but I'll have to ask Lieutenant Pike."

"He's gone to the palace, to talk with the governor again. You and I'll talk with each other. I came especially to see him; thought maybe he might help me, and I hoped to talk with one of his kind. American blood is powerful scarce in Santa Fe. There's only one simon-pure Yankee, except myself. He's Sol Colly; used to be a sergeant in the army and was captured six years ago along with the rest of a party that invaded Texas. But he doesn't live here. A Frenchman or two, here from the States, don't count. My, my, it's good to speak English and to hear it. As soon as the lieutenant learnt my name he remembered about you; but he couldn't wait, so Don Bartholomew went to find you. Now

you'll go home with me, where we can be snug and private."

He spoke in Spanish to Lieutenant Bartholomew, who nodded.

"Certainly, certainly, señor. Until to-morrow morning."

And Jack gladly marched home hand-in-hand with his father, James Pursley, of Kentucky, the discoverer of gold in Colorado, and the first American resident in Santa Fe.

XXI

GOOD-BY TO LIEUTENANT PIKE

THE lieutenant and men were to be sent clear to the city of Chihuahua, more than six hundred miles southward, where the commanding general of all Mexico had headquarters.

An officer and two soldiers from Governor Alencaster had called for him again in the morning immediately after breakfast. He returned to the Lieutenant Bartholomew house fuming. Stub never before had seen him so angry.

"I protested with all my power" he related, to Lieutenant Bartholomew and Stub's father. "I said that I should not go unless forced to by military strength. The governor agreed to give me a paper certifying to the fact that I march only as compelled to, but our detention as prisoners is a breach of faith. I consented to come to Santa Fe, for the purpose of explaining to him my accidental presence within his frontiers; and I have so explained. He has even read my papers and my commission. Now he orders us still further into the interior."

"You have my sympathy, señor," proffered Lieutenant Bartholomew.

"That's the system here, sir," added Stub's father. "I am an American citizen, and was brought in by the Injuns, from outside territory; and I can't leave without a permit. I'm close watched—but I've still got my old rifle; and give me two hours' start and I'll not ask for any other passport."

"When I reminded His Excellency that my unintentional trespass was not to be compared with his, when he dispatched five hundred troops far into the Pawnee country, well within the territory of the United States, he had no reply," pursued Lieutenant Pike. "However, I am to dine with him this noon, and march soon thereafter, to meet an escort under that Lieutenant Melgares below."

"You will find Don Facundo Melgares to be a very pleasant gentleman, señor," spoke Lieutenant Bartholomew.

"He spent a great deal of time and money looking for me," Lieutenant Pike grimly laughed. "He might as well have stayed here, for I should never have yielded to him, north of the Red River; not while I had a man left. I understand that Doctor Robinson, whom the governor mentioned, also has been sent south."

"That is possible, señor."

The lieutenant shrugged his shoulders.

"And I suppose my sergeant and the other men

will follow me." He turned to Stub. "Come, boy; we'll look up our party and order them to be ready. Their arms are to be restored to them, at least. We're not to be driven like cattle. His Excellency has promised that, and we'll march as soldiers."

"You take the boy to Chihuahua?" queried Lieutenant Bartholomew.

"What?" Stub's tall father demanded, with a start.

Lieutenant Pike smiled.

"No, sir. He remains here, where he belongs. I am only too happy to have reunited him and his father. His service with me ends—and it has been a greater service than you may imagine."

They hastened for the barracks. Midway, the lieutenant halted in covert of an old wall.

"You have my journal?" he asked, guardedly.

"Yes, sir."

"Good! You may give it to me, now. Quick! There!" He swiftly tucked it away. "It is the only paper unknown to the governor, and I mean to keep it. Last night, when I considered that he was done with me, I heard that the men were drinking wine with the town people. So in case they should drink too much I sought them out and took the other papers from them. They're faithful, but the wine might have made them careless. I stowed

the papers in my trunk again (this was a little hand-trunk that the lieutenant had carried, with help, from the Arkansaw, as his only important baggage); then early this morning the governor unexpectedly sent for me and my trunk and I had no chance to open it privately. By trusting in him I was cleverly outwitted, but thanks to you I've saved my journal. Had I found you last night I would have taken it, to place it with the other papers."

So, thanks to a boy, the journal of Lieutenant Pike was saved to the world.

"Can't you get your trunk again?" Stub asked, as they hurried on.

"It will go down to Chihuahua with me, but in charge of the officer of the escort, for the commanding general."

"Do the papers tell anything wrong?"

"No, unless they are wrongly read. There are letters, and scientific notes upon the locations and distances; and maps. If the commanding general thinks we were spying out the country, he may try to keep everything. But the journal would be the greatest loss."

And truth to say, Lieutenant Pike never did get back any of the papers in the trunk.

Freegift and John Brown were at the barracks;

the other men were rambling about. John went to find them.

"To Chihuahua is it, sir?" Freegift gasped. "Without our guns?"

"You will get your guns."

"An' don't we wait for the sergeant an' them others, sir?"

"We're not permitted. I'll leave a note for Meek with this boy, here, telling him to keep up courage and follow us."

"But doesn't the lad go, too, sir?"

"No. He stays in Santa Fe."

"I've found my father, Freegift," eagerly explained Stub. "He's here. The Utahs brought him here. I've got to stay with him."

"Found your dad, eh? Well, well! An' good! I want to know! That's all right, then. We've been some worried over you, but sure we felt sartin you wouldn't desert. Expect you'd rather have found your father than the Red River; hey?"

"I don't know," Stub stammered. "I wish we'd found both."

His heart ached for Lieutenant Pike, who seemed to have found nothing—unless he really had intended to come here.

"We soldiers must not complain; we will only rejoice in your good fortune, my lad," answered

the lieutenant. "All in all, we did not toil in vain, and we have done what we could. Have the men ready to march at twelve o'clock, Stout." And turning on his heel he strode off.

"A fine little man, an' a smart one," mused Freegift, gazing after. "We'll go with him to Chihuahua—an' to the ends o' the earth, if need be."

The lieutenant left first, shortly after noon. He had dined with the governor; when he came out of the palace, into the public square, prepared to start, the governor's coach was waiting, attached to six gaily harnessed mules. A detachment of dragoons also were waiting; so were Stub and his father, and old Sergeant Colly who had been captured, six years ago, in Spanish territory.

They shook hands with the lieutenant.

"Good-by. Good-by, sir."

"Good-by." He held his head high, like an officer and a free American. He did not mind the stares of the town people. "Remember, you are Americans."

"Don't forget us, sir, when you reach the States," old Solomon Colly implored. "Don't forget Sergeant Colly of the army, who made his only mistake when he was trapped by these Spanish. You'll do what you can for us, sir?"

"I'll not forget; not while I have breath in my

body," promised the lieutenant, earnestly. "I will report you to the Government."

The governor had clumped out, in his uniform and jack-boots. Lieutenant Bartholomew, and Captain D'Almansa who was to command the escort southward, were with him. They all entered the splendid coach decorated with gilt.

The door slammed. The servant climbed to the seat beside the driver—the sergeant in charge of the dragoons shouted an order, and away they went, mules and horses at a gallop.

That was the last that Stub or anybody in Santa Fe ever saw of young Lieutenant Pike.

Stub went to the barracks with his father and Solomon Colly, to watch the men off. They were about to go. He shook hands with them, too: with Freegift, and Alex Roy, and John Brown, and Hugh Menaugh, and William Gordon, and Jake Carter—that brave six, still limping from frozen feet.

"Good luck to you, boy."

"Good luck."

"An' never forget you've been a Pike man, on one o' the toughest marches in history," added Freegift. "Stick up for your country. You've l'arned never to say die—an' that's the American of it."

"Yes, sir. I know it."

"Ah, lads, but Sol and I wish we were going

with you," sighed his father. "But maybe you'll be back again, by the thousand, and then we'll see the flag floating."

"Maybe. There'll be a time," replied Freegift. "There'll be a time when the flag'll float over this very spot. But we won't need any thousand. Five hundred of us under Cap'n Pike could take the whole country. An' now we know a way in."

"I've half a notion that the lieutenant wasn't so sorry to be made prisoner, after all," Stub's father remarked to him, on the way home. "There's something secret about this that he doesn't tell. As that soldier friend of yours said, in case of war—and war over this borderland dispute is likely to break out any day—the army will know what's ahead of it."

"They'll let Lieutenant Pike go, won't they?"

His father chuckled.

"They'll have to. He's not the kind of man they can keep. They can't prove he's a spy, for he's in uniform (what there is of it), and his orders are plain to read."

This day was March 4. It was two weeks later, or March 18, when at last Lieutenant Saltelo brought in Sergeant Meek and Corporal Jerry Jackson, Terry Miller, John Mountjoy, poor John Sparks and Tom Dougherty, Baroney, Pat Smith and the few miser-

able horses and the main baggage. There was great rejoicing, again, in Santa Fe.

Sergeant Meek was taken at once to Governor Alencaster, but 'twas safe to say that the governor would find out little from *him.* Stub sought the other men out, at the barracks. John Sparks and Tom were unable to walk; they had lost their feet, and the most of their fingers; Baroney and Pat, and, they said, the sergeant, too, were in bad shape, from the march through the snows, to the stockade; but they all welcomed Stub.

"Where's the cap'n?"

"He's gone to Chihuahua."

"And what are ye doin' here, then? Did you run off from him? Say!"

"No. He told me to stay. I found my father. We're living here—till we can get away."

"You did? Found your father! Want to know! Hooray! And the cap'n and the rest to Chihuahua. So it's to Chihuahua the same for us, no doubt."

"Faith, that's proper," declared Tom Dougherty. "We'll not desert him. If it be prison for wan of us let it be prison for all of us. What's left o' me'll stick to the cap'n. Sure, John an' me are only poor cripples—whether we'll be paid I don't know; but all we want is to be with him, doin' as

we can. He's had the hardest luck an' he complained not wance."

When Sergeant Meek came, Stub gave him the note. The sergeant read it.

" The cap'n says for us to keep our arms, and not lose the baggage. Yes, that's the caper. Bear in mind, lads. We're for Chihuahua in the morning."

They, also, were sent down to Chihuahua. Stub never saw any of them again, either. He heard, much later, that the lieutenant and six had safely reached Natchitoches; but from Chihuahua no word ever came back of Sergeant Meek, Corporal Jerry, Baroney the interpreter, Privates Sparks, Dougherty, Mountjoy, Miller, and Pat Smith, except that General Salcedo, the commander, had found them a hard lot to handle and had got them out of his province as quickly as he might.

So probably they caught up with Lieutenant Pike somewhere in the United States; and as likely as not some of them were with him to support him when he fell, dying on the field of battle, away north in Canada, during the War of 1812.

They all loved him.

Thomas N. Takiwaki